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THE IDEALISTIC  
CONCEPTION OF  
RELIGION



THE IDEALISTIC  
CONCEPTION OF  
RELIGION

*VICO HEGEL GENTILE*

BY

ALINE LION, D.PHIL.

WITH A PREFACE BY

CLEMENT C. J. WEBB

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## PREFACE

THE authoress of this book has asked me to introduce it by a few words of preface and I welcome the opportunity of doing so, for I know how passionate an interest in the subject and how prolonged and assiduous a course of study have gone to the making of it. English is not the writer's mother tongue, and (although I, at any rate, wish that I could handle with a like facility any spoken language which to me is foreign) it may not be out of place to remind the English reader of that fact at the outset. But it is of more importance to note that her approach to the subject which she discusses is along lines somewhat unusual in this country. Although the work of the Italian idealists has rightly attracted much attention of late among professional students of philosophy, here as elsewhere, and the aesthetic doctrines of Croce have influenced a far wider circle, yet a book dealing with the problems of the Philosophy of Religion by one trained from the first in their school is likely to strike English readers as unfamiliar in outlook and presuppositions. But this very circumstance at the same time gives the book a special value. The authoress is one who is thoroughly at home with the school of thought to which I have referred, and has enjoyed the privilege of personal instruction by Professor Gentile, whom, rather than Signor Croce, it will be observed, she is disposed to follow in her view of religion as an autonomous and permanent form of spiritual life. It is indeed upon this autonomy and permanence of religion that she is chiefly concerned to insist. Neither science nor philosophy, she is convinced, can supersede it or take its place. This contention is of special importance in an age which is perhaps distinguished from all others in no particular more conspicuous than this, that neither in public nor in private life is it now taken for granted as it was in the past

that normally every man practises or at least professes some form of religion, and that religious differences may be expected to be one of the most important factors dividing nation from nation, and, where one nation embraces adherents of more than one religion, must be reckoned with as an ever-present source of internal division and discord. Moreover, the religion on the necessity of which to a complete human life the book before us insists is not a mere subjective sentiment, which can dispense with a conviction of the independent reality of its object or can perform its function in abstraction from any particular creed or mode of worship. It is recognized or rather earnestly contended by the writer that one might as well be content with a social sentiment which should stop short of expressing itself in active membership of a political community as with a religion satisfied to hold aloof from participation in the actual life of some religious fellowship.

We may, as philosophers, legitimately endeavour to deny the common principles exhibited by the many political organizations or the many positive religions which the history of mankind offers to our investigation. But such investigation is only possible where the material is to hand; and that material is in either case an experience only to be had through actual acquaintance with some political or some religious life which may teach the investigator what it means to be in the one case a citizen, in the other a worshipper.

It is obvious that a view such as that defended in this book, while it must, on the one hand, by calling attention to the common characters exhibited by all religions, tend to create a mutual sympathy among those to whom their own religion, whatever it may be, is precious, will also, on the other hand, by emphasizing the claim to objectivity as such a common character and still more by acknowledging that religion can only exist in some particular form or other, bring into prominence the questions which are at

issue between the historical religions of the world, and the incompatibility between their rival pretensions to the exclusive possession of religious trust. Upon the consideration of these, however, the present book does not enter; they lie outside the scope of the subject with which the writer has chosen here to deal.

I am sure that the public, to whose judgement this essay is submitted, will find in it a discussion all the more suggestive and informing that it comes, as I have pointed out, from a new quarter, and is influenced by traditions different from those which have inspired most of the discussion of the problems of religion to which we are in this country accustomed; and I may heartily commend it to their serious attention.

CLEMENT C. J. WEBB





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## NOTE

I WISH to refer to four recent works which have greatly modified the problem of the relation between Science and Religion, but which I could not deal with in a study devoted to the contributions of three idealists: *The Nature of the Physical World*, by Prof. A. S. Eddington; *The Mysterious Universe*, by Sir James Jeans; *Religion in the Making*, and *Science and the Modern World*, by Prof. A. N. Whitehead. The views arrived at by these eminent authors as to the relation of known to unknown are quite consistent with the main tenets of Idealism; and I look forward to dealing with them in a special paper.

It has been most gratifying to find, for instance, that in spite of the quite different standpoint from which he approaches the question, Prof. Whitehead considers, as I do, that the Reformation was a retrograde and not a progressive movement. On the other hand I must hold against him that the scientific activity of the sixteenth century and the parallel theological development—which he has left out in spite of its inevitable influence on the formation of some of the scientists—were definitely progressive and pregnant with much that was to be of high importance later on.

A. L.

## INTRODUCTION

SINCE the Renaissance, religion has been either considered as belonging to the practical aspect of life or identified with feeling. In the one case, it was taken into consideration mainly owing to its usefulness, and Machiavelli may thus be described as the first utilitarian. In the other, the whole of religious experience as feeling was wrongly opposed to what is rational and utilitarian in man, and Rousseau may be considered the first romantic. To these popular views modern idealism opposes a new conception. The synthetic tendency of that school of thought enables it to overcome the superficial hostility between religion and philosophy.

Religion certainly plays a great part in practical life; and emotion undoubtedly accompanies the recognition by the believer of the omnipotence and infinity of his God. But the moral and educational action of any church, no less than the religious emotion of the believer, implies the creed, which, whatever its form, is the necessary ground of any religion.

To realize so natural and so obvious a fact a slow and powerful reaction was required. Its continuous development was due to the efforts of more or less unknown but eager thinkers; yet the speculative contribution of Vico, Hegel, and Gentile was required to establish the eternity and the autonomy of religion. It is not, however, when dealing directly with religion that they have best served its cause. It is by the synthetic, the historical character of their respective doctrines that they have done most to overcome the analytic and unhistorical views of life in general and of religion in particular among which are the two mentioned above. For religion, art, and philosophy can appear in their actual and living form only so long as they are left in their context, that is, in the actual and historical life of man.

Neither Vico nor Gentile has dealt directly with religion. Hegel has; it is not, however, in his lectures on the philosophy of religion that he has done so most satisfactorily; but rather in the theory of Mind expressed in his logic. Here only do we find him at one with his Neapolitan forerunner and his Sicilian successor; for here religion appears as necessary to life and therefore autonomous and eternal. He wanted to oppose both its exclusion from theoretical life, which made it good only for women, children, the weak-minded and uneducated in general, and its identification with what he called mere feeling. Above all, he wanted to restore its essential objectivity, and this could only be done by recognizing its theoretical character. Religion must first of all be knowledge if it is to modify practical life. Hence his treatment was to become dangerous when he began to deal directly with religious experience. His zeal for 'raising it' to the sphere of knowledge was bound to cause a misrepresentation of the nature of religion. By making it knowledge, knowledge of the universal, he was led to make it an inferior form of philosophy, an historical stage to be necessarily outgrown.

This feature of his philosophy of religion has aroused a well-justified hostility in every orthodox quarter, and involved the condemnation in such quarters of idealism as a whole. But of the harm thus done by Hegel, Vico and Gentile are perfectly innocent. First of all, they do not deal with religion separately; they take it where it is to be found alive and playing its part, that is, in the context of actual life. Why is it there? What is its function in the actual synthesis of man's experience? Such are the questions which they help to answer. The evil against which they wrote is a hydra-headed monster: abstract individualism. In opposing it in its general but multiform development, they have made it possible to oppose on philosophic grounds the three erroneous views mentioned above. 'That religion should be considered as belonging to practical life,

that emotion should be considered the essential feature of religion, finally that religion should be considered an inferior form of knowledge and therefore an historical stage to be outgrown, are views which are not compatible with a philosophical understanding of the life of Mind.

The last of these views arose indeed in the bosom of idealism, as we have seen; but it did so only because Hegel misused his own philosophical method; and the same mishap befell his philosophy of art. In both cases his failure was due to the empirical use of a philosophical method. Obviously the differences between the methods required by science, history, and philosophy should not be overlooked; but it is only since Hegel that such differences have been thoroughly worked out. Though it must spring from the daily problems of our empirical life, any doctrine in order to be philosophic must be altogether universal in its conclusions; since the universal forms of the spirit receive their particular content, case by case, in the actual historical synthesis of experience.

To Hegel daily life did indeed present religion as a problem to be solved. Undoubtedly the question was put to him by actual circumstances; but he did not draw upon concrete experience as the Italians do, whether, like Vico, they take history as their ground, or, like Croce and Gentile, their own personal and direct experience. Not that he lacked the gift of observation; he had the habit of noting details as much as, or perhaps more than, any one else; but his system did not emerge in the least from such observations, which remained empirical data. That which is original in his speculation has a purely abstract character; and he deduces his theories of art and religion from his central conception. When he comes down to concrete experience he tries to make a universal form of mind account for empirical facts such as he sees in religious or artistic experience. Consequently religion can be conceived by him as immediate, uncritical knowledge; though

the immediacy and uncritical character ascribed to it are never found in actual experience free of mediation or criticism.

It must be stated here that such inquiry needs a method which is unique and nearly impossible to preserve throughout. The reason is quite obvious. Hegel's conception cannot enable him or any one else to account for the infinite variety of historical embodiments assumed by religion. For the essential and therefore permanent character of any aspect of life gives rise to the infinite variety of its historical forms through the infinite number of its possible combinations with the other forms of that same life. This is perhaps more obvious in the case of art. Each actual and therefore concrete artistic experience receives its individual character from the particular way in which art blends in it with religion, science, philosophy, on the ground offered by economic, political, and moral circumstances. Consequently, an abstract conception of any such aspect of life is bound to lead the inquiry towards erroneous conclusions.

On the other hand, if we start from historical or personal experience, dealing with religion, scientifically, critically, or historically, case by case, the result will be works like Otto's,<sup>1</sup> like Baron von Hügel's,<sup>2</sup> or possibly a good history of religion. Such results, extremely valuable as they are, must remain empirical and non-philosophic. Unless carried to the point of entailing a complete reconsideration of our conception of life as a whole, such an inquiry will fail to give us the essential ground common to every historical form of religious experience. On the other hand, if carried to this truly speculative point, our inquiry will cease to be scientific or historical in the strict

<sup>1</sup> Otto: *Das Heilige*, 1917 [Eng. trans. *Idea of the Holy*, 1923, Oxford University Press].

<sup>2</sup> von Hügel: I. *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1908, revised edition 1923); II. *Eternal Life* (1912, Dent, London); III. *Essays and Addresses* (1921, Dent, London).

sense of the words. A study of the life of the spirit must either reduce acts to facts and treat these facts scientifically or historically, or else treat the act as an act and thus become philosophy. The act becomes a fact whenever it is submitted to an analytic treatment, which singles it, abstracts it, out of its context, i.e. makes it an abstract and therefore lifeless term; but it remains an act when on the ground afforded by the historical synthesis and the scientific analysis it is lived anew in a truly philosophical synthesis; for then, and then only, it preserves the spiritual and dynamic nature, in virtue of which it is actual and concrete life. The best scientific research into religious experience and the most learned discussion upon religious phenomena seem to form an independent class of intellectual production. Although the necessary ground of a philosophical account of religion, they are not themselves that account. For instance, William James's<sup>1</sup> *Varieties of Religious Experience* is typical of the pseudo-scientific attitude towards religion; whilst Baron von Hügel's various works illustrate the religious and historical attitude. Neither of them is in the strict sense of the word philosophical.

Aware that to keep the right method here would be like walking on the edge of a knife, it is not without reluctance that we have attempted to write on the nature of religion. For the subject of this essay is indeed the nature of religion, and not this or that aspect of religious experience. Our contention is (a) that it is possible to consider religion as autonomous and eternal, owing to its character as a necessary and therefore universal aspect of life; (b) that religiousness, whether poetical, scientific, or philosophical, is not equivalent, still less superior, to a positive religion, for it lacks the definiteness which it can only receive from its historical embodiment, that is, from the limitations which

<sup>1</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a Study in Human Nature*. New York and London, Longmans, Green & Co. (1902, revised 1922).

the latter involves, and that alone can determine religiousness, giving it actual concrete reality; (c) that in fact religiousness when devoid of historical embodiment, being purely subjective, goes hand in hand with humanitarianism, sharing the vagueness of that comfortable benevolence; duties to mankind mean duties to nobody, and the worship of an indefinite notion means a worship that cannot be regulating, least of all binding.

The opposite view is indeed difficult to uphold since it involves the implication that what lacks form is superior to what has form, what is not determined to what is determined, what is devoid of historical coherence to what has it, and finally what would be purely subjective, if it could exist, to what is both subjective and objective. On the other hand, if any given historical religion could be purely objective, exterior and historical, that is, if it could lose completely the religiousness subjective, inner and eternal, that has called it into being and of which it is the historical body, it would be at best a decaying corpse corrupting the whole spiritual atmosphere. History stands witness to the truth of our statement. Each time that a church has stood in need of reformation the fact was due to decay, either of the religiousness, which as an inner force had called it into being, or of the ecclesiastical organization which is just as liable to disease and decay as any other historical body. When the monks of Cluny proceeded to reform monastic orders, such orders had ceased being religious orders; their monks, though still wearing the former garb, had lost the former religious life and sunk into a gross materialism involving a low sensuous life.



## CHAPTER I

### THE BREAKING UP OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

LIFE came to be viewed in an abstract analytical manner when Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, a period that appeared dark and obscure to people who knew too little about it to understand it clearly. The first or one of the first symptoms of this change was the divorce of science and religion, and of philosophy and religion, which took place at the dawn of modern times, and was not only followed but accompanied by the political process of differentiation that led to the national type of state. Now both this divorce and this process of differentiation entailed a dualism which ran through every form of life. On the one hand, in the sphere of learning, secular knowledge was opposed to religious doctrine; on the other, State and Church opposed their imperial claims in the sphere of everyday life. The history of philosophy has considered the fruit of these conflicts to be due to practical reasons. The necessity incumbent upon scholars and scientists of guarding their studies from ecclesiastical interference, or more popularly the fear of the Inquisition, was but too easily assumed as the ground of the distinction between two truths, known by the name of the double truth.

But then what of the political process of differentiation; what, furthermore, of that other dualism of theory and practice which was being gradually recognized? The Middle Ages had scarcely been conscious of it. St. Bernàrd had defined philosophy as *sapientia vite*; and nobody would have thought, as is too often thought nowadays, that an intellectual is essentially unfit for practical life. St. Anselm, Bishop of Canterbury, was probably the best philosophical mind of his time, and known for this as well as for his sanctity. The fact did not prevent, but even furthered, his election to an archiepiscopal see, the holding of which meant considerable administrative and even

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political activity. A still better instance is perhaps that of Albertus Magnus's election to the see of Ratisbon.

Indeed, the theory of the double truth, on the one hand a matter of faith, on the other of knowledge, has been wrongly ascribed to the desire of men of science and thinkers to keep their intellectual life out of reach of the political and ecclesiastical authorities. This could never justify a radical distinction of theory and practice. Such an explanation implies in the scholars a duplicity which hardly agrees with what we know of the most eminent upholders of this theory; and it would be both unjustifiable and unjust to leave it at that. They were often sincerely devoted to truth and dedicated the whole of their lives to its service.

Giordano Bruno is the most typical instance. It is impossible to believe that he could have invented a distinction between two kinds of truth simply to save his life. It is more in keeping with what we know of him to admit that what he said to the magistrates of Venice was his honest conviction. He could not see then that his theories would entail a criticism of the doctrine of the Church; and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity, since when at last he realized that they did imply such criticism he steadfastly upheld his opinions even when facing his final ordeal. Undoubtedly he was a heretic; but he was also a staunch Catholic, brought up in the orthodox teaching of a Dominican convent. He believed in the Church as the real expression of God in the world; but no less did he believe in the power of man's mind, which was then engaged in a series of astonishing discoveries. The result of his own study was to him a revelation as worthy of belief as the one contained in the Gospel. Thus he was confronted with two truths, in each of which he believed whole-heartedly. Later, he realized the infinite and therefore unique character of truth and died for it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See MacIntyre, *Giordano Bruno*, London, Macmillan; Roger Char-

The fact is that, so far as the point has been worked out, the Italians were the inventors of this doctrine; and many of their scholars had fallen to the low moral level which is but too well known. Those of them, however, who were philosophers and men of genius, had something, namely Truth, which they worshipped as the great artists worshipped Beauty; and this worship, which had a religious character, kept them far above the spiritual level of the scholarly and artistic courtiers, who were painting and writing for ready money, at the service of their princes. It was not merely to avoid danger that the 'new men', as Bacon<sup>1</sup> called them, upheld the theory of two truths, implying thereby the radical dualism of theory and practice. The first origin of this dualism must have been speculative, and it is obviously in the history of philosophy that we must look for the first ground of the distinction that wastodeprive religion of its universal and autonomous character.

The first assertion of a possible distinction concerning truth is perfectly orthodox; it is that which Thomas Aquinas drew between revealed and rational truth. This, however, is a distinction between two modes of knowledge; or rather, in the light of modern logic, we should term it a distinction between believing and knowing. Certainly it cannot be a distinction between two truths, for this would be far too gross an error to be ascribed to so great a thinker. It may have given rise to the mental habit of distinguishing two truths; yet it is not likely to have led to the thorough-going analysis which alone could

bonnel, *La pensée Italienne au XVI<sup>ème</sup> Siècle et le courant libertin*, Paris, Champion; D. Berti, *Giordano Bruno, sua vita e sua dottrina*, Turin, Paravia; F. Fiorentino, *Studi e ritratti della Rinascenza*, Bari, Laterza; Giovanni Gentile, *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento*, Firenze, Vallardi.

<sup>1</sup> See Giovanni Gentile, *Galileo e il suo problema scientifico*, op. cit., pp. 218-40; F. Fiorentino, The whole preface to the *Opera Latina Conscripta* of Giordano Bruno, Naples, Morano.

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entail the opposition of theory and practice. When, however, the natural development of scholasticism had reached its climax and analytic methods became the order of the day, the Thomist distinction had already prepared the minds and the terminology for such a conception. The one truth could only appear as that which is and must be a matter of immediate faith, in order to be acted upon with perfect discipline, without criticism or the mediation of reflective thought. The other would then seem to be reached by man through the free exercise of his intellectual power, and should be submitted to the most methodical and rational criticism before it could provide the ground for further research. Whether our view as to its origin is justified or not, that distinction was bound to lead to a serious misrepresentation of life in general, and of religion in particular. Immediacy is indeed the essential characteristic of belief as opposed to knowledge; but it is the necessary ground no less of our knowing than of our doing.

To understand the history of philosophy at this dawn of the modern world, when nations were coming gradually into being, it is necessary to remember a few obvious facts. First, there are no national philosophies; for philosophy is the historical process of Mind. Secondly, as a consequence of the oneness of that process, there can be no absolutely new notions in the most sublime of systems, or in their practical realization such as pedagogy or politics. Thirdly, we cannot have any international system of philosophy; and this ought to be sufficient to forbid any hope of abolishing national differences.

Every great nation is a contributor to the life of Mind, and is so in its period of greatest efficiency; whilst all men, in so far as they think, are also contributing to it. Each school of thought takes from another school the problems in solving which it will become an original contributor. It may take them from a previous school which has developed them as far as is allowed by its own genius, as

Bacon and Descartes took their problem from the thinkers of the Italian Renaissance; or contemporary schools may be mutually complementary. English empiricism and French rationalism obviously supplement each other in this way.

Four hundred years ago, largely owing to the buoyant intellectual life of the Middle Ages, western Europe came of age. Objective, and therefore synthetic, tendencies had been fully satisfied. Philosophy was no longer able to innovate in that direction; it turned from what it called abstraction towards actual experience; but it did so with analytical methods which, in view of the subjectivism of the age, were bound to give us the most abstract view of life. Analysis proclaimed itself loudly enough in the breaking up of what had been the spiritually and intellectually united states of Europe, the existence whereof was sufficiently asserted by the crusades and by scholasticism.

During the early Middle Ages legal and philosophical studies had reached a very high standard; later in the same period the humanists' cult of classical history and literature rose higher still. Through the shaping, character-giving, influence of their intensive studies, the scholars of various countries had gradually developed differences that were beginning to separate them. In the time of St. Anselm it was impossible to trace his national character in a man's works. By the time that John of Salisbury wrote, differences had developed; and it is not impossible to detect his sturdy British character standing out distinctly in some parts of his work.<sup>1</sup> The process of philosophical and political differentiation must not therefore be considered as parallel movements, running through the history of the ages. They are, in fact, one and the same, namely the passage from a synthetic to an analytic age.

<sup>1</sup> See Prof. C. C. J. Webb's edition of John of Salisbury's *Polycraticus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, vol. viii. 19, vol. ii, pp. 371, 372; vi. 18, vol. ii, pp. 77-8.

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It is impossible to ascribe the change entirely to the growing individual consciousness of man's spiritual autonomy, and to a desire on the part of kings to rid the political sphere of ecclesiastical interference. The desires of scholars and kings are not the cause of this movement; at most they are its manifestation. The new analytical and national tendencies which they inaugurated were not the result of an arbitrary choice, due to the desire to rid themselves of ecclesiastical interference. History, or Mind, or Civilization had been developing for some time in an analytic direction; and theory and practice were so perfectly blended that the very promulgation of their radical distinction, coinciding as it did with the assertion of national individualism, is the best illustration of their indissoluble unity.

## CHAPTER II

### LAW AND OBJECTIVITY IN MEDIEVAL LIFE

THE Fathers of the Church and the theologians had felt the necessity of reacting against the individualism tending to anarchy which sprang from the spiritual and therefore subjective doctrine of the New Testament. All through the period of the elaboration of dogma the exponents of immanence were declared heretics with a consistency truly marvellous. The strength with which a man of such speculative power as St. Augustine emphasized the transcendency of truth, whilst the whole of his writings is animated by the most lively sense of its immanence, is no less wonderful. Both facts show that the Church felt it incumbent on itself to assert the objectiveness of reality. The New Testament had asserted the liberty and creative power of man's mind, and the equality of men as endowed by God with a soul capable of discrimination. This, with the superiority of the world within, was bound to, and indeed in several cases did, intoxicate men, for it made them feel that they were above all human law. It was not only their right, but their duty, to refuse to comply with any law contrary to what their conscience acknowledged as moral law.<sup>1</sup> Here, and not in the Renaissance, with its pagan influence, must we look for the origin of man's consciousness of his autonomy.

Moreover, the best thinkers, equipped as they were with pagan philosophy, could not there and then conceive systematically the spirituality of the real. This circumstance joined with the feeling that individualism should not be allowed to develop into anarchy, to give to the

<sup>1</sup> The polemics of St. Augustine, specially against the Donatists, are a sufficient illustration of the fact. See Migne, *P.L.*, vol. ix; but those of Tertullian are considered still more significant in respect of this neo-Christian individualism, of which he was in a certain sense a champion.

philosophy of the Fathers of the Church and the schoolmen some of its static features. Consequently the dynamic and spiritual intuition of life contained in the Gospel is cast into the marble-like mould of ancient thought; and the result tends more and more towards an objective and static conception of spiritual reality. The early Christian, looking round and into the exterior world, sees only individual minds; and just as he sees natural reality displaying itself in the infinite number of individuals, so he sees spiritual reality as an absolute multiplicity. In practice, however, he is saved partly by the very unsystematic character of the new doctrine, and above all by the ideals of charity and love. On the other hand, to live according to these ideals was easier than to elaborate a system fit at once to embody them and to satisfy the logical claims of non-Christian scholars. The theologians could not do this with the philosophical instruments left them by the classical schools of philosophy; and if they had developed subjectivism there and then, it would have been a rational but atomistic type; it would have been in fact Pelagianism.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the theoretical and practical problems that the Church had to face determined the leading tendencies of the time, which could not be subjectivism and liberty. Consequently all the subjectivist thinkers, in spite of their genius, which was often superior to that of their judges, were either invited to modify their position or condemned to do so by their fellow students in philosophy. This discipline was not, however, extrinsic, neither was it then, as later, necessarily enforced by penalties. Subjectivist theses were rejected on theoretical grounds.<sup>2</sup> What was important was to secure the independent reality of the object of religion. First, it was urgently necessary to assert the transcendency of God, in order to preserve the doctrine of

<sup>1</sup> See Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte*, 2nd edition, Leipzig, 1893, pp. 49-58.

<sup>2</sup> See Harnack, *op. cit.*, bk. ii, chaps. 7 and 8.



creation free from all trace of the rival doctrine of emanation. Secondly, the mystical aspect of the new doctrine and the assertion that 'everything is possible to him that believeth' inflamed men's minds and might have made of Christianity an antisocial force. The schoolmen had therefore good reason to be suspicious of the slightest tendency towards the theory of immanence, which they feared no less because its adoption at that time would have led to pantheism, than because it encouraged men to think themselves like God and thus led to anarchy.

History, by which we mean experience, has set the problem before us—and philosophy enables us to understand it.

It is a law of mind, at its first reflective stage, to think of its own knowledge as knowledge of something, and then to test the reality of this something without which it could not know. Whether the individual mind or Mind as such is in question, it asserts itself and realizes itself through the knowledge of what is. Man must know before he can ask how he comes to know. The first stage of the speculative thought of a whole civilization, or the first stage in the development of the cognitive powers in a child, will afford sufficient illustration of the fact. In order to question his own capacity, man must be conscious of the part he plays as a knowing subject, and, first of all, he must be such a knowing subject. Ordinary language warns us that man becomes self-conscious, self-diffident, or self-assertive, through his knowledge or awareness of his surroundings, which philosophy terms his not-self.

In its early youth our modern world was necessarily objective. Nevertheless whatever the consistency displayed by the theologians in enforcing more and more fully the transcendent reality of the Object, i.e. God, it must be understood that subjectivism is more than once asserted during the Middle Ages, together with the claim of liberty that follows inevitably in its track. Most of the heretics

were subjectivists, often with a strong sense of the immanence of truth. The genius of some of the orthodox writers, too, was such that, whatever their modesty, they could not ignore the part they played in the world in general and in the acquisition of knowledge in particular.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, their objectivism is by no means to be considered as identical with that of the pagan systems. A Christian school of thought could not overlook the necessity of allowing man the liberty which alone can give him moral responsibility and enable him to be God's collaborator in the creation of the world of values that the world *rerum gestarum* must be. The philosophy of the Middle Ages is indeed objectivist, synthetic, religious, and essentially assertive of law; but this does not mean that it knew no subjectivism, no analysis, no spontaneous art, no liberty. The former characteristics predominate, but the latter are all there; it could not otherwise prevail over them.

This objectivism had reached its climax in the thirteenth century, and the men who followed began, or rather, gave the general public the impression that they had begun, to split hairs;<sup>2</sup> and subjectivism appeared, although not immediately, in speculative garb. The new intellectual life first appears in Italy, and by the time Petrarch wrote his beautiful Latin and still more beautiful Italian the substance of the philosopher and the subject-matter of the artist have ceased to be the predominant object of consideration. The lyricism of his poetry is indeed the poet's

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Ethica* vi, lectio i, Vives ed., Paris, 1875. This however, is specially the case when writers dealing with the relation of the human will to the divine will have stressed the part played by love, i.e. charity, in determining the value of an act of will. See, for instance, S. Bonaventurae, *Opera Omnia*, Guaracci ed., 1882, vol. i, pp. 851 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See *Index Scolastico-Cartésien*, by Étienne Gilson, Alcan, Paris, 1913. Prof. É. Gilson has traced there the doctrine of the great scholastics that must have been familiar to Descartes, together with the use they made of the vocabulary which he was to use himself; and in consequence these philosophers appear to the reader as the forerunners of Descartes not only in time but also in doctrine.

self-assertion, the nimbleness of his Latin the gait of a man seeking in perfect liberty weapons to fight the Aristotelian doctors. His knowledge of scholastic doctrine is scanty,<sup>1</sup> but he opens fire against it with the intuitive genius of an artist who feels rather than knows that the individual man needs recognition. In the Italy of his time artistic motives became paramount in private and in public life, in learning, and even in religion.

The warning given above must be repeated here. It must not be concluded from what has just been said that law had been any more devoid of liberty, and religion of art, than the objectivism of the theologians was of subjectivism.

In the life of Mind, art, religion, and philosophy are never found pure. If Mind is ultimate reality, it is the Absolute, and as such eternal and necessary; whatever belongs to it partakes of this absoluteness and must be equally eternal and equally necessary. No one of its essential forms can therefore be taken apart from the rest except as a working hypothesis: since they are all necessary they are all eternal and therefore always simultaneously present.

The first of these eternal forms is religion, and that, in its primary aspect, is the recognition of objective reality, that is, of the not-self. As such it is the source of law and the ground of the religious position which man assumes whenever he feels himself transcended by what is at once self and not-self, by what is both in him and outside him. The second form is art, or more widely, the glorification of the subject. Through it the blissful realization of man's own value and liberty appears in the artist or the youth. Art flourishes. With the same blissfulness, the artist and the youth expand their personality, and by asserting a

<sup>1</sup> On this subject of Petrarch's philosophical culture a great deal has been written. Most illuminating are *Pétrarque et l'humanisme d'après un essai de restitution de sa bibliothèque*, by P. de Nolhac, Paris, Champion, 1907; *Studi sul Rinascimento*, Giovanni Gentile, Valecchi, Florence, pp. 5-62.

liberty inclined to degenerate into licence, and by trying to ignore religion, they tend to reject law. The third form is philosophy, that is to say, the form of reflection. We no longer have awareness or knowledge of the object in itself, no longer awareness and knowledge of the subject with the celebration of his own power; but the self-knowledge of the mind apprehending itself as the subject knowing an object, as some one knowing something. The last form might seem alone to be concrete. In the first the necessity of apprehending the something which we know compels the mind to lose sight of, that is to abstract from, itself; whilst in the second the necessity of asserting themselves with their full rights and liberty compels men practically to shut their eyes to what limits them and therefore to abstract from what transcends them. In reality they are all equally concrete and actual because they are not historical stages, succeeding and therefore excluding one another. On the contrary the predominance of the one implies the actuality of the other two. All equally eternal, they must be distinguished in any study of the life of Mind; but it is impossible to meet one of these forms pure of admixture with the others. One may and usually does predominate, but they are all invariably there. If we apply this conception to the human world, to a given form of civilization or to the life of a single man, our consideration will be historical; from a philosophical point of view it can only be ideal. We see Mind as eternal, the forms of its life appearing in it eternally present and indispensable to each other.

### CHAPTER III

#### LIBERTY AND HUMANISM CHECKED BY THE REFORMATION

WHEN the development of mind, whether in the life of the individual or in the history of a civilization, reaches the point of development which it had reached when Petrarch was writing, the subject, i.e. man in his activity, already conscious of his own strength, longs for full autonomy. The full autonomy of mind, that is of understanding, and that of conscience, preached by the Gospel, was what the scholars meant by their war-cry 'Liberty'. It is this which, blending itself with the growing feeling of discontent with the Church, and with the Church's own consciousness of the imperative need of reformation, was to provide the theoretical ground of the practical change which is called the Reformation.

We cannot any longer believe that the movement which runs through humanism and the Renaissance was due to pagan influence. On the contrary, the sons of scholasticism, out of love or hatred for Aristotle, wanted to read him in the original. Western Christianity was then possessed of unbounded curiosity and an almost infinite strength. It wanted to stretch its powerful limbs and extend the realm of its knowledge in time and space. But the scholars were as uncritical as a youth reaching manhood; the thirst for liberty, as well as the conception of autonomy of thought and conscience, which they ascribed to the Greeks, were their own creation and unknown to the Hellenic world.

Such notions came straight from the New Testament, above all from St. Paul, and received the sanction of the great popes all through the early Middle Ages. Intolerance would appear to be a consequence of Greek studies, which out of the very perfection of the method they inaugurated begat dogmatism. The Christian creed had

become so logical and systematic that the consistency of the whole gave rise, though certainly not to the notion of dogma, at least to the dogmatic spirit since acquired by Christian theology. Previously the last appeal was always to man's own conscience and to God's will.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of the decretals and the canons on the validity of excommunication are quite clear on this point. The view which Stephen of Tournai sums up seems to have been the canonical doctrine of excommunication. Up to the thirteenth century a sentence of excommunication, he writes, can be regarded in several ways. A man may be excommunicated before God and the Church when he has justly been cut off from the Church on account of his crimes; he may be in the position of one who is excommunicated before God, and therefore not a member of His body, which is the Church, although he has not been cut off from the Church by its sentence; or again, a man may be excommunicated before the Church and not before God, if the sentence of excommunication is unjust and pronounced without due cause. Innocent III states the same definition more briefly. The judgement of God alone is always true, and thus a man may be condemned by God and held guiltless by the Church; or he may be condemned by the Church and held guiltless by God.<sup>2</sup> Again, the doctrine of the Church on the source of human law is free from its subsequent entanglement with that of a sovereign power. Law springs freely from man's life, or rather is that life itself determining custom. Constantine, and all ancient law, had recognized the importance of custom, but they had not considered it the one source of law. He had in fact definitely stated that it could not 'prevail against reason or law'. But Gregory IX<sup>3</sup> deliberately adopted the

<sup>1</sup> See R. W. and A. J. Carlyle, *Mediaeval Political Theory in the West* vol. ii, pp. 244, 249; Stephen of Tournai, *Summa Decret.*, c. iii. 9. 4 dict ad c. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Innocent III, *Decretals*, v. 39. 28.

<sup>3</sup> R. W. and A. J. Carlyle, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 153, 159.

opposite view and gave as the final judgement of canon law the view that custom is supreme over all positive law.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Machiavelli's view that good laws and good institutions make men good would have sounded futile to medieval publicists and canonists. For them it was men who made both laws and institutions; and they could never have considered the ruler as the source of law or his will and person as above the law; it was his function to apply the law, but he was nevertheless subject to it like the rest of the community.<sup>2</sup>

Liberty of conscience, which was the war-cry of Protestantism, is a purely Christian ideal. If Greek history was not a sufficient proof of this, it would be easy to show that the Greeks knew nothing of what we mean by liberty.<sup>3</sup> To the Western Christian liberty was the supreme good, and scholars may have ascribed to the Greeks their own feelings on the matter. That these perfectly trained scholars lacked the historical sense is a fact, and Marsilius Ficinus, who translated Plato in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico and Poliziano, never suspected how much they modernized the authors whom they cherished so dearly.<sup>4</sup> To the men of the Renaissance the participation of all the citizens in the management of public affairs appeared a sure warrant of liberty. They thought that a régime in which each man's own share was secured to him was bound to satisfy the claim of liberty. In short, they mistook *rights* for *liberty*. If liberty means autonomy, we may well believe that the Athens of Socrates did not know it. Neither religion, philosophy, nor politics left any place for it. Perfect systems like that of Aristotle leave no

<sup>1</sup> Gregory IX, *Decretals*, i. 4. 11.

<sup>2</sup> R. W. and A. J. Carlyle, op. cit., vol. iii, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> W. D. Ross, *Aristotle*, London, Macmillan, pp. 75, 78, 188, 201; Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1113. 3-1175<sup>d</sup> 3, 1147<sup>a</sup> 26. 31, 1114<sup>a</sup> 12. 21; *Metaphysics* E. 3; Plato, *Laws*, 904, c; *Republic*, 617-18.

<sup>4</sup> Giuseppe Saitta, *La Filosofia di Marsilio Ficino*, Principato, Messina, chap. iii.

room for autonomy and free will; and if we find anything in the nature of eschatology, it rather involves purification than punishment. Responsibility would obviously require a liberty incompatible with the Hellenic outlook; and besides, the Greek did not need it. At least in the best days of Greece he had no private life, and it is not until the days of Rome that the *res privata*<sup>1</sup> claimed a recognition which required a definition of the relation of the citizen to the State. In classical Greece, even in the fifth and through the first half of the fourth century B.C., citizens had no private independent life apart from that of the State; if such dualism had existed, the *Republic* of Plato and the *Politics* of Aristotle could not have been what they are. Even in Rome, however, man was what he was *qua* citizen; and until Christ said 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's', man had no real private life and therefore did not feel the need of what we call liberty.

As to the ideals of the Renaissance, the influence of ancient literature was merely an easy way of accounting for what needed no extrinsic cause. Christianity, which for three centuries had made the utmost efforts to know the world and God, had, through these very efforts, developed unawares the strength of man's mind. This was bound to assert itself; and self-assertion always means autonomy and liberty. All educationalists know that this is so in the development of the individual, but it is more difficult to realize that it is no less so in the development of a civilization. A scientific and objective education entailing the strictest discipline develops the most independent individuals; the dogmatism of theology and the abstract rationalism of science and philosophy proved their intellectual force in developing the most independent age, the world has known.

That independence and the consequent reaction against

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Myres, *Political Ideas of the Greeks*, London, 1927, p. 59.



the discipline of the previous age is the common feature in the works of an Italian, an Englishman, and a Frenchman, who faced the same problem; finding it on the threshold of modern civilization. In dealing with it they illustrated the different characteristics that scholasticism and humanism had fostered in their respective countries.

Bruno faces the problem of scientific truth, and in so doing justifies the general impulse to reject the authority of antiquity. The notion which he upholds was indeed known to antiquity but seldom acted upon. Speaking of the ancients, he argues that truly old age must be wiser than youth, but in comparison to the sixteenth century antiquity is the infancy of mankind. Each generation brings its contribution to the construction of man's experience, and hence the conclusion *Veritas est filia temporis*. Thus he proclaims what will be the motto of Italian thought: reality is essentially *Historical Reality*.<sup>1</sup>

In England Bacon was influenced by the same conviction, namely that the regard of man for the authority of the past was the greatest obstacle to the progress of science. The veneration for Aristotle was above all to be condemned as paralysing the initiative of modern scholars. He wished them no longer to consider science as the work of antiquity, that is, as a work already completed, but rather as an arduous task awaiting the efforts of men. The traditional syllogism was not the right instrument for the increase of knowledge; and the method based upon its use was to be discarded. Man, therefore, in order to increase scientific knowledge should trust first of all to his personal experience, to the immediate experience of his senses. Whatever was Bacon's own regard for history, nothing could be more anti-historical in its consequences than this assertion. He himself could ignore deliberately all the past that lay behind man's actual experience; because this deliberate abstraction was balanced in him by the practical sense of

<sup>1</sup> *Opere Italiane di Giordano Bruno*, vol. i, pp. 25 ff., 293-7.

the statesman, and by the love of life as a whole so strong in Elizabethan England. But Reality in the eyes of every typical Englishman was to be *empirical reality* and have its roots essentially in the experience of the actual subject.

A Frenchman faced the same problem. René Descartes is at first sight everything that Bacon is not. He recoiled from the cares of office and from the noisy turmoil of society, whilst the English philosopher was a mixture of recklessness and worldly wisdom draining to the dregs the cup of life, and anxious to enjoy everything that power and wealth could bestow. A more philosophical consideration will reveal between the two men and the two countries, beneath the real but superficial differences, such essential affinities as to make them appear two different parts of a single whole. Both lack the youthful enthusiasm common to German and Italian thinkers; and both give shape to their theories with a cautious prudence that marks them as men of the world. Their conclusions, however, reveal their divergences and affinities better than the analysis of their lives. Descartes reached certitude by way of observation and direct experience, but it is in the silence of meditation in the innermost world of man that he did so when he at length pronounced his famous *Cogito ergo sum*. The touchstone of certitude is identified with the actual consciousness of man in the act of thinking. If I think, surely I am; as far as I think I can be sure of being. Inference has yielded this first principle; and Descartes's philosophy will henceforth be deductive. If I think, surely I am . . . but of the rest, that is to say, of the knowledge of the exterior world, I can have no certitude; because such knowledge is not direct, being obtained through the mediation of sense. As to traditional learning, it is communicated to me and was originally obtained through the senses; it is therefore just as liable to error as my actual sense-knowledge. With this Aristotle, or rather the traditional worship yielded to him, comes to naught. The conception of the mind as

originally a *tabula rasa* is here just as categorically laid down as in Bacon's works. In both cases man must begin his work from the foundation, and test through his own direct experience, rational with Descartes, empirical with Bacon, the legacies of his forerunners. The difference implied in the terms empirical and rational is fundamental. Pedagogy and politics when grounded on English philosophy may lay down rules and formulas deduced from systematic theories; but they will always be tempered by a direct appeal to experience and common sense. The cogency which, for good or evil, is characteristic of French theories is the consequence of their perfect deduction from a first principle. Hence the absolute character of the French monarchy and the no less absolute character of French democracy. With the exception of men greatly influenced by foreign philosophy, French thinkers conceive reality as *rational reality*.

England and France entertain no undue reverence for the past; such reverence, they think, weakens modern initiative. Rather they assert man in his individual determination *hic et nunc*, as the ground of reality. The two schools complete, stimulate, and temper each other; the basis of both systems is man as an individual, whilst his outer and his inner world receive alternatively the greater attention. Their mutual dependence is specially obvious in the attitude taken by their respective countries in religious and political matters. If the seventeenth century was for France and England the century of metaphysics, the eighteenth drew the conclusions and proceeded to apply to life all that was fertile in this philosophy.

Bruno's conception of historical reality was left on one side by his contemporaries. His individual is neither rational nor empirical. Man for him cannot be bereft either of his roots in the past or of his projection in the future. Far from diminishing man, this view makes everything depend on him and expands his personality through

an endless process; but this could not be developed into a systematic theory in the sixteenth century. Such a synthetic conception requires two distinct terms—God and man, the world and man—of which it is the synthesis; and philosophy had as yet only dealt with the first. The analytic process of the French and English schools had to provide the second term. Thus France and England shared the honour of being the champions of liberty. It was an arduous task. In fulfilling it they provided the second term, namely the conception of man as an absolutely free and self-sufficient individual. To do this they had to separate him from his context and this vitiated their conception by making it abstract; but in doing so they made it possible for the thinkers of the new Germany and the new Italy to reach the speculative conception in which the two terms man and God, man and the world, man and the thing he knows, in short subject and object, can be related in a relation which is their unity without entailing their identity. This conception in which the transcendental and the empirical meet, like the fingers of God and man in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, could not be conceived as long as the subject did not stand face to face with the object, and the historical character of the human world could not be detected as long as man did not stand face to face with the world; any philosophy moving in that direction before France and England had done their work was bound to end in pantheism and therefore in heresy.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROTESTANTISM AND JANSENISM AGAINST INDIVIDUALISM

THE MIDDLE AGES had been intent on the realization of the objective world; and both religion and politics had collaborated with philosophy to give man a religious attitude and make him realize his own nothingness. By love or by force he had been made to realize his own limitations, that is, to acknowledge the claim of the not-self. Modern thinkers, reacting against this, were to overlook this claim in order to enforce that of the self; and to oppose man to God, to the world, and in particular to the State. Now all this meant the proclamation of liberty in a manner which led people to think of it as existing apart from law. Liberty so conceived is indeed incompatible with the belief in a transcendent God; and the transcendental nature of God could not then be conceived stripped of spatial and temporal character; the faithful could believe in this eternal Being inside us and outside us, before us, and after us, but they could not contemplate it in a philosophical manner. Thus lay philosophers could not understand the theories of the Jesuits Fonseca and Molina<sup>1</sup>, who conceived of liberty as the opposite of necessity, while they could not tolerate for a moment the scholastic doctrine which taught that liberty was the opposite of compulsion. The result was that these lay scholars claimed an absolute liberty which is an abstraction, when they did not, like Descartes in his pre-critical stage, outdo the predestinarianism of future Jansenists by conceiving of liberty in such a manner as to allow none even to God.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See D. L. Molina, *Concordia Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis, Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione*. Lethielieux, Paris, 1875, pp. 4, 8 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *La Liberté chez Descartes et la théologie*, by Étienne Gilson, Alcan, Paris.

No further reason is needed to account for man's growing inability to grasp the true speculative nature of religion; but Machiavelli is a very good illustration of the way in which it happened. On the one hand, nobody ever realized more completely or directly that the seriousness of life as a whole and of morality in particular rested on religion. On the other hand, nobody ever had a less adequate understanding of the true nature of the relation between morality and religion. He inaugurated in the historical world of politics the experimental method which Galileo introduced into scientific research, and he wanted to set aside everything that was not actual experience. In his impatience to make away once and for all with essences and universals, he clung desperately to the particular. Had he been more consistent, this would have been fatal to his conception of history, since it would have reduced him to the level of a Guicciardini. Though his speculative mind was not eventually paralysed by that scientific method, unfit to be applied to the matter of his consideration since it should have proved fatal to a true understanding of life, he was misled on several matters and among them religion.

Just as much pained by the corruption of his country as Savonarola, he had turned, humanly enough, to contemplate the glorious part which it had played as the centre of the Roman Empire. There he had seen a stern seriousness pervading the whole of life, whereas an utter want of seriousness pervaded that of his contemporaries. The fact that religion had pervaded each and every occupation, whether domestic or civic, in the life of the ancient Romans, appeared to him the very ground of that sobriety and seriousness. He was not in a position to realize that the lack of a religious attitude was due to a new idea of the relation between man and God, between man and the world, between the self and the not-self, a relation from which sprang all rights and duties. Being

an important agent in this movement, he did not see it as we do. An experimental devotee of facts could only come to one conclusion. Since the religious attitude of the Romans pervaded more thoroughly with its moral and practical sternness their domestic and civic activities, obviously their religion was better than his. The pagan and Christian religions were compared like machines working to the same end; and the machine which seemed to work better was declared the better machine.<sup>1</sup>

Although he was not a great classical scholar, and therefore was not strictly speaking a humanist, he was too near humanism not to be imbued with its culture. He could not overcome the conception of man as an individual trying to realize his own private self in a world where his personality should expand as freely as possible. He could not conceive that the recognition of one's limitation, that is of objectivity, is both the basis of all serious morality and at the same time, through law, the only source of liberty. Nor could he, therefore, understand that religion is an eternal form of life; and that paganism and Christianity as historical forms of it are only comparable in respect of their practical organization and not at all in respect of their spiritual doctrines. They could only be compared on experimental grounds at the dawn of abstract individualism, when the intimate interpenetration of the subjective and objective world was by no means understood.<sup>2</sup> The humanity, or rather the spirituality, of the not-self, of the objective world in which man realizes his will, was not grasped at all; the not-self and the objective world were merely understood as the limit of man's liberty. Nothing short of this abstract individualism could bring the best thinkers to consider the source of law as extrinsic to man as they did when, identifying positive religions with religion,

<sup>1</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, lib. ii, cap. ii.

<sup>2</sup> It was felt by Giordano Bruno but not understood; since he mistook interpenetration for identity, thus landing himself in a gross form of pantheism.

they mistook the historical embodiment for that of which it is the embodiment, the recognition of the not-self *as infinite*.

Empirical, naturalistic, mechanistic, all the European thinkers of the two following centuries realized the practical necessity of religion as instrumental to morality, and failed even to suspect the real nature of its intimate relation to ethics. And yet the lack of religion had only spread through Italy. Nearly all the rest of Europe was drenched with blood, shed either in the wars of religion or by order of the Inquisition, in whose proceedings the secular powers interfered to a great extent, though seldom on the side of mercy. In Italy nothing of the kind could happen; because men do not face death or torture without passionate convictions; and while the younger races had such convictions, Italy had reached a precocious maturity, and reaped too rich a harvest between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. She had assimilated too easily and too quickly the wisdom of antiquity; and was sceptical and languid like a young man who has prematurely realized his own individual independence through a legacy from his elders. Machiavelli had good ground for despair. Nevertheless it is only the general failure to grasp the intimate connexion of the human spirit with the world in which the human will realizes itself, which can account for the fact that a man of genius could regard the source of all law as extrinsic to man. Machiavelli however certainly did not come to regard as advisable the arbitrary introduction of religion instead of one another as the best means of ensuring morality. The political consequence is a most illiberal view, that 'good laws and good institutions make men good'. This is not at all surprising, for Savonarola had fallen into the same error, and the result had been that the Florentine constitution of 1494 abolished the parliaments in which the whole people used to meet.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the

<sup>1</sup> See his *Tractato . . . circa il reggimento e governo della Città di Firenze*; in this short indictment against tyrannical government, i.e. that of the Medici,



Middle Ages had understood that laws and institutions were made by men, and in fact sprang from the life of men, the Renaissance, anything but liberal and democratic, understood laws and institutions as coming to make men happy and good.

Philosophy was bent on securing the recognition of the theoretical subject, whereas politics seem to have been bent on securing an even stronger government to rule over the practical subject. The contradiction, however, is more apparent than real. The man of the Renaissance is in Italy an individual exalted by culture and natural gifts, and in our northern countries also he is the man who can think and act rationally, so that he does not flourish in the highest or lowest strata which make up the realm of incompetency. Louis XI and Philippe de Commines, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Machiavelli, are the forerunners of a new era, that of a bourgeois world which does not rest on a religious conception of man, but on a semi-scientific, semi-philosophical understanding of life which amounts to a real misrepresentation of man and his relations to the world.

The development of this bourgeois individualism was slower in other countries than in Italy. Strong religious convictions prevailed during the sixteenth century. It is a fact, however, that through the heavy price which men often paid for their faith, and also through the divergences of opinion arising between friendly nations or individuals (see Montaigne); through an infinite number of causes such as the mutual criticism of the different churches all due to the Reformation, the north and the west of Europe matured rapidly at least in respect of religion and early reached the stage of criticism. Unfortunately by the time they did so people had completely lost sight of what religion was, and of the nature of the force underlying

he makes the virtues and the vices of the people depend on the good or bad government of the city: as if the former were determined by the latter.

all churches; and a century later they tried, above all in England, to do what Campanella had already tried to do in Italy; that is, to find a rational substitute for religion.

To say that philosophers could not grasp the nature of religion does not mean that they were not religious. Owing to the distinction between theory and practice Descartes or Hobbes did not ask themselves how their beliefs harmonized with their theories. Descartes rivals Louis XIV in self-assertion, and the tendency then embodied in these two exponents of the French genius, as previously in Richelieu, called for the religious reaction of St. Cyran and Pascal. The position assumed by Mind whenever man is exceedingly religious implies the self-negation advocated by the Jansenists. If God is, he must be everything and man must therefore be nothing. If the will of God is what they think He must be in order to be truly divine, the will of man is powerless. Pascal's success was that of a writer; his philosophical genius was perhaps not superior to that of Descartes, but he understood the relation of the self to the not-self in a way that makes him a forerunner of Kant. He felt painfully the divinity and the bestiality of the human mind with the conflict it entails. This keeps him from the abstraction of all the other philosophers. Through his very consciousness of the conflict he knows that truth is in us and outside us; and he could not, like Father Noël, against whom he polemized, be merely objective or merely subjective. He alone deserves the title of philosopher of experience; he alone draws directly from experience, and there self and not-self are as inseparable as light and shade. His dynamical conception of scientific knowledge<sup>1</sup> *dont la perfection dépend du temps et des efforts des hommes* does not allow of his being considered a true follower of Jansenius;

<sup>1</sup> See his letters to Father Noël. *Œuvres*, ed. Brunschvig, vol. ii, pp. 90-106.

but his mystical and mathematical bias led him to stress the object to an extent that prevented him from having a deeper influence on the development of Western thought.<sup>1</sup>

Descartes was no more intent on stressing liberty than Louis XIV; his first conception of it was even Jansenistic.<sup>2</sup> Still less were they bent on opposing religion. They were merely blinded by the concentration in their actual selves of political and theoretical reality; but when this political and theoretical abstract individualism developed fifty years later in decadence and corruption France fell little short of Machiavelli's Italy.

When intellectual life is too unphilosophical to realize that religion is a necessary factor in man's experience, history offers the development of the part it plays. It is religion that makes man bow down to something that is not himself, thereby positing law and accepting his own limitations. Independently of personal convictions, we see religion appear in history as a constant element in the life of man; were it as the negative creed of the atheist, more or less preponderant it is always there, as the recognition of all that is to him the not-self.

To see and understand this was then impossible, above all to Louis XIV and Descartes. They do not mean to be anti-historical any more than they mean to be anti-religious; but in them the self swallows up the not-self. Descartes in his very elegant, and very French, *Discours de la Méthode* lifted man out of his historical context with an ease that reveals him as the embodiment of the speculative genius of France, and as a man bred in the best society of the time. Yet this work is rich in religious motives and the best illustrations of the historical process of mind. It displays the riches of a mind in which were

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Molina had already spoken of the mathematic character of the notion of liberty against which he wrote before the Jansenists popularized it. Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *La liberté chez Descartes et la théologie*, by Étienne Gilson.

combined the legacies of the past and the germ of all that was to be subjective and positive in the philosophy of several centuries. Kant and St. Augustine are there. . . . Yet nothing is more anti-religious and anti-historical than the severing of the individual from his setting. This tendency, however, was that of the whole age, and had determined the reaction of protestantism and that of Jansenism. Louis XIV's *L'État c'est moi* and Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum* were no more than indications of the spirit of the time. The part of these men was to close the era in which objectivism had prevailed and to inaugurate that of subjectivism; and their fame rests on the degree of perfection with which they played this part.\*

Both were believers and convinced Roman Catholics. The contradiction thus introduced in their lives finds its most exquisite expression in a vow of Descartes. He pledged himself to make a pilgrimage to our Lady of Loretto if he could free himself of all his duties as a soldier and a man of the world. These prevented him from attending freely to the satisfaction of his longing for scientific study, and hence his impatience to retire from a world full of rights and duties, where men suffer and require help and love. The anti-religious nature of such a feeling requires no comment; it is worse than that of many self-styled atheists. What Descartes longs for is liberty to attend in perfect freedom to his studies, and thus in this act of humble devotion he is eminently self-seeking.

The whole history of the human world flows between law and liberty like the sea between the pillars of Hercules; but the relation of the two terms is most difficult to grasp. To tell man that truth, and with it the criterion of justice, dwells in the innermost part of his soul, is a most Christian saying; but in the works of St. Augustine this statement has a very definite implication; the belief in God's presence in the heart of man. God with His transcendental character is in us indeed, but just as He is in us, He is

outside us. It is in fact this transcendental character which entails the consequence that the recognition of God is the source of all law and liberty. If we think of Him only as outside us, we have pure objectivity and pure law, at the expense of liberty; if we only feel Him in us, we have pure subjectivity and pure liberty; in either case justice in the modern sense of the word is to our minds as elusive as it was to Plato.

With the schools of thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Descartes's rationalism seems to expel belief from philosophy, and from the entire theoretical and intellectual life. It only seems to do so because his contribution to philosophy is one of the first stepping-stones to idealism; though neither he nor his contemporaries could even suspect this. The relation which he had established between will and knowledge entails the conclusion that every rational act was to be good and every irrational one bad. With Croce modern philosophy has adopted rationality as the criterion of the *economic* value of human actions but not of their moral worth.

The devotee of our Lady of Loretto is here anything but Christian or religious. Rational learning may supersede religious and moral education, and the consequence is a distinction between educated and uneducated far less easy to erase than the class distinction of feudal times. Then a man could be made a squire or even a knight, provided that he proved himself worthy by actual deeds. Now between educated and uneducated the difference is as great as between the citizens and non-citizens of the pagan world, a most illiberal result of a liberal movement.

Feeling, intuition, worship, these elements of spiritual life were practically discarded to make room for reason. Art and religion were thus almost denied in their essence. At best the former could only be considered didactic, or hedonistic, that is, a means of spreading ideas and knowledge or a source of pleasure. As to the latter, it was

disposed of in a more radical way. Theoretically misrepresented, historically ignored, it was nevertheless to be treated with great consideration by English philosophers. It had been useful and even necessary in the dark ages of ignorance; but to the century that was to call itself the age of light it was a hindrance. In the view of most French writers it was an impediment of which mankind must be rid at all costs; in the view of most English writers, an impediment which should only be tolerated for practical reasons and amongst the lower classes.

The enlightenment of the people and the anti-religious nature of philosophy were somehow linked and even nearly identified; and the war against religion was often confused with the war against ignorance. One step only was wanted to make ignorance a synonym for religion. Nobody waited to inquire why religion was everywhere, why it was even a factor in social life. It is true that the question could not have been answered even if it had been asked, since any investigation of the subject must have been historical, and of this no one was capable. The Italians lacked the philosophical basis for such a work; for with their liberty, with religious and civic consciousness, they seemed to have lost their speculative power. France and England at that time lacked the turn of mind necessary to make such an inquiry with any degree of intelligence. Germany was still as it were in her 'teens' until Leibniz appeared to herald the intellectual coming-of-age of his country. Moreover, men who lack the ability to solve historical problems lack also the will to do so, for the inclination goes with the ability. Religion remained a puzzling problem, and the failure of philosophers to understand this enigmatic  $x$  was to breed many difficulties in pedagogy, politics, and economics. •

Man was eventually raised to divine honours and hailed as the Divinity in the cult of the goddess Reason. His intellectual activity became the principle of reality, which

it is so far as it is transcendental, that is, in so far as, transcending his private aims, he becomes the collaborator of God; who is in him as the light that lightens every man, but is also outside him; who is with him but was before him, and will be after him as the negation and the principle of time and space. But the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could only know this activity so far as it is empirical, abstractly individual, self-contained, and therefore not divine. The philosophy of enlightenment, for all its generosity and noble impulse, was unable to realize what transcends the reason and experience of every individual man.

## CHAPTER V

### NATURAL RELIGION AND UTILITARIANISM

THE characteristic of the English philosophy of enlightenment is a reasonable adaptation of theories to practical circumstances. This is best illustrated in the greatest thinkers in England at that time, and in works dealing with the question which remains a burning one throughout the century. Less and less did the philosophers understand religion. To be consistent with their ideas of man and life they should have proclaimed its uselessness. Locke, however, far from so doing, came to be responsible for a compromise that reveals the intelligence of a political writer rather than the cogency of a philosopher. For him, as for St. Thomas Aquinas, it is impossible to believe that God's word can contradict the natural light which He has himself granted to men.<sup>1</sup> So he considers the Scriptures necessary, because the truths which they reveal would otherwise be beyond the reach of man's natural powers. He could hold no original views on the problem of religion, for logically he should have declared it useless; but he wished to preserve it for practical reasons, seeing in it a social force. He who asserted so vigorously the need for individualism in practice and subjectivism in theory could not realize the religious position in which man acknowledges the infinity of the object, and thereby assigns it a definite character. This opened the way for the unphilosophical and unhistorical notions of Deism and 'natural religion'.<sup>2</sup>

Locke's ethics, on the other hand, take human felicity as the highest aim of man's life. This, though certainly not an original view, had at least the merit of being perfectly consistent with his subjective assertions. It shows

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophical Works of John Locke*, London, 1843, pp. 480 ff.; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, i, iv; *Summa Theologica*, i, 9, i, art. v.

<sup>2</sup> See specially op. cit., pp. 489 and 490.



the growing misrepresentation of the essential basis of morality, that is to say, of religion as man's immediate awareness of his limitations, and of love as the only practical means of transcending these limitations. Utilitarianism had already appeared in Italy in the writings of Guicciardini and even in those of Machiavelli and Baldassare Castiglione. The individual, considered from a non-religious point of view, appears as self-sufficient, and his purely particular will can only aim at a purely particular good. Now modern philosophy, in the writings of Benedetto Croce, has distinguished this as the *economic* from the *moral* good.<sup>1</sup> Kant had the same idea, though less fully developed, when he opposed the formal character of the good as an object of will to the good which is the particular aim of a particular act. But in the latter part of the seventeenth and all through the eighteenth century people had lost sight of the will of God. They had not as yet conceived of the transcendental will, and in spite of their efforts to understand morals their good could only be the useful.

The necessity in which Locke and the best thinkers found themselves throughout the period of enlightenment of tempering their theories with practical considerations was an indication of the fundamental weakness of their whole position. A discrepancy between theory and practice always means, obviously, that the theory is wrong; but in the eighteenth century consistency of theory and practice was an ideal that could not be realized. Although French rationalism was intent on transforming society in order to make it consistent with rational theories, English empiricism continued to hold that some ideas which might in theory be excellent were in practice incapable of realization. As soon as philosophy and science were considered to have superseded religion in the search for truth, law appeared in need of justification, and the result was the development of the notion of *jus naturale*. At first sight it

<sup>1</sup> *Filosofia Pratica*, Benedetto Croce, Laterza, Bari.

is not easy to connect the two facts; but a certain amount of reading has led to a view which will be stated here merely as an opinion.

So long as men were sufficiently objective, custom, that is to say, the necessary and therefore rational part of daily life, was law. No reason was asked. The law was self-given in the most rigorous sense of the word. The jurists knew the tripartite division of law into *jus naturalis*, *jus gentium*, and *jus civilis*, which had been handed down from Roman times; but this did not involve any of the purposes which men like Grotius and Hooker may have had in mind. This traditional tripartite division merely opposed the natural law of conscience to the positive law; and within the category of positive law the customs common to all the known historical world were opposed to those of each country. Each of the three had its source in the life of the people themselves; but when after the thirteenth century, owing to the increase of culture, the quality of the mind and of its information became all-important the source of law was no longer considered to be below but above. Thus arose the idea of a natural law opposed to such man-made positive laws. The development of the great national states with the centralization of technical services due to the necessity of giving the King a greater autonomy were certainly important influences in the change. Here, however, as always, theory and practice were at one. The growing pre-eminence given to rational and expert knowledge certainly contributed to the suppression of popular meetings, as for instance in Florence in 1494.

After natural law came the discovery of certain natural moral codes; and this is sufficient to show that the *jus naturale* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is not the medieval natural law, which was nothing but moral law as written by God in the conscience of man, where Rousseau was to rediscover it. The belief in a natural

sense of right and wrong could be traced to the Stoic school; but this did not make things easier. The same people who considered positive religion useless for themselves accepted its position as established for the moral care of the lower classes. Religion appeared to them the proper means of curbing men's egotistical tendencies in the lower class, to which was denied the enlightenment that could provide educated people with principles of discrimination between right and wrong. They could not realize that this function when exercised by any church is due to the attitude of the believer towards his divinity. Yet it is the theoretical nature of belief that makes man realize what is to him the not-self, thereby giving to the moral law the only kind of objectivity that can free it from the constant fluctuation of selfish motives. To recognize all this men needed a synthetic view of reality; which, however, could only be reached through the development of analytic thought. Without this, religion could not be conceived of apart from the churches, which were considered the embodiment of an authority thwarting man's initiative and interfering with his intellectual and political activity. It was, therefore, natural that positive religion, paralysing to the educated, should only be tolerated for the sake of the lower classes. Nature and the natural laws shared the honour of the time with a mechanistic representation of everything, even including the spiritual life. Thus what was really a highly philosophical need, the sense that man's higher life should in some way be autonomous, was condemned to degenerate into a kind of determinism due to the desire to explain everything in the light of natural science, and indeed of mechanism. The basis of Hobbes's political theory is already a law of nature, and his psychology is as nicely planned as any piece of machinery. Psychological enthusiasm led men to account for every spiritual fact by tracing its cause to some small part of the engine. They even tried to determine the nature

of the organ which was the cause of action in the soul. Such investigation, semi-philosophical, semi-scientific, was above all mythological, and due to the religious enthusiasm for natural science. This mystical enthusiasm for the material world, and this unbounded faith in pseudo-scientific method, which caused the misrepresentation of man's spiritual life, proved an outlet for the deep religious feeling of these would-be freethinkers. They believed in science, they worshipped nature, they revered her laws, and as men are wont they tried religiously to conform themselves, their lives, and their world to the object of their worship. Like all materialists they were also mystics.

The cult of Greek and Roman literature inspired Cumberland to develop the Ciceronian *lex naturae*, opposing altruistic tendencies to the selfish motives of Hobbes's theories;<sup>1</sup> but of all such attempts that of the Earl of Shaftesbury is the most satisfactory. He explicitly proclaimed the autonomy of morals, separating them no less from psychology than from theology; for the intrinsic value of morals is equally destroyed whether the good deed depends on the mechanism of nature or on the fear of eternal punishment. It is no wonder that Shaftesbury had a wide and deep influence on German thought, for he was but pointing out the synthetic method which German Idealism has since steadfastly followed. Goodness and virtue are real in themselves. It is easy to see why Shaftesbury did not fully develop so original a theory. The philosophy of his time afforded him little more than psychology, and his personal gifts and social position fitted him rather for a study of the arts than for so arduous a task. It was, therefore, perfectly natural that his theory should develop into mere eudaemonism; yet his conception of virtue as harmony, unphilosophical though it may be, was certainly rich in possibilities of future progress. He combined the

<sup>1</sup> *Traité philosophique des lois naturelles*, R. Cumberland, transl. Barbeyrac, Amsterdam 1744; see specially pp. 1-36, and chap. ii.

conclusions of materialism which made selfishness the prime motive in human life with the theories which upheld altruism as the chief social instinct, and in the light of these he explained social and moral facts. Fusing and balancing egoistic tendencies with altruistic motives, Shaftesbury's theory throws light on the nobler side of *Illuminism*.<sup>1</sup> Even if it is not speculatively sound, it is the blending of all that was best in a movement which was nothing if not generous in its childlike optimism. For him each school possessed half the truth, and he inferred that only the harmonious combination of both tendencies could produce real morality. His theory therefore implies the perfection of the individual as the ultimate end of all intellectual life, the ultimate end of *Illuminism*. This problem of morality was treated in a large part of the general literature of the time, and also in a host of minor philosophical writings; and the variety of bases provided for ethics is sufficient to betray the original lack of such a basis in the philosophy of the time.

Thus utilitarianism came into being under various names and from various sources. It was a poor theory; but no better account of men's relations with each other could then be found. 'To be moral, that is to say, to do one's duty, is possible under all circumstances, and saints have existed even among those who called themselves atheists and anti-idealists. Nevertheless, a clear understanding of what constitutes a moral act and of what is meant by doing one's duty undoubtedly facilitates its performance. This understanding, however, need not be philosophical, and even if it is so it must at the same time be religious. First, belief in God means belief in *a definite representation of an infinite God*, for definite is not the opposite of infinite. We accept the nature of our God as the ideal by which to regulate our lives in the very act of faith by which we recognize His

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue*, London 1699. See specially book i, *Of Virtue and the Belief of a Deity*.

divinity. An indefinite ideal could not regulate anything, whilst the definite object of our worship regulates our activity. Secondly, we love God in our neighbour, whom we cannot therefore use as a mere means. We love God and therefore want to do His will. Every one can understand this from a religious point of view; but no one can understand it philosophically without first assuming towards the transcendental self the attitude of the humblest illiterate who knows that God is in him and outside him, and that to do his duty he must overcome all that is material and selfish in him in order to become a fellow worker with God. In either case that which transcends every act, and yet gives it its value, must be clearly understood by man or felt by him in a definite intuition in order to be freely willed, for the indefinite cannot be apprehended, at least by a human mind.

In the eighteenth century it was impossible to account for moral value; the universal had been reduced to the merest abstraction, and the supernatural was rejected as irrational, and had not yet been reintroduced as the transcendental. It was, in fact, impossible to account for any universal value; the deficiency was acutely felt and gave rise to Deism and 'natural religion'. In their attempt to satisfy the need for infinitude in the object of worship men missed the true goal, which is, and must be, both definite and infinite. They had so little idea of a universal that they turned to the conception of an indefinite deity. Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the first English exponent of natural religion, did not indeed look upon the soul as a *tabula rasa*; to him it seemed a book which displayed its hidden wisdom through education. This way of conceiving the mind was at that stage perfectly legitimate; but he developed it in a way that entailed the necessity of a special religion for the educated.<sup>1</sup> Nothing could be farther from St. Paul's 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of

<sup>1</sup> *De Veritate*. London, 16. See specially pp. 208-35.

angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing'. And again: 'Charity seeketh not her own. . . . Charity never faileth, but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail . . . whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.' Charity is the love of God in men, that is, the effort that we make to accomplish the good. It means also the love of truth, that is, the effort we make to know the true. That force which makes men transcend their particularity by making them seek what is not their own particular and private good was not accounted for by rationalism or empiricism nor by natural religion nor Deism; for their infinite Deity was indefinite, and could only be a negative term.

The radical distinction drawn between men on the score of learning had been fostered by the spread of culture under the influence of humanism and the Renaissance. With Deism, however, it assumed a religious and political significance which drew a sharper line between classes than the feudal hierarchy had ever done. The new religion was condemned by its exclusion of the uneducated. If religion is the relation of man to God, above all if it is to be *natural religion*, it must surely be founded on the *natural* soul common to every man. This exclusiveness of natural religion is enough to mark it as a most artificial account either of morals or of religion.

Its main feature, however, is the anti-historical view of life that made men incapable even of suspecting the social origin of the religious forces which had been at work since prehistoric times. Of religion, from their experimental point of view, they could only see the practical organization in the different churches. Of the need from which the pre-Christian forms of religion had sprung they had not

the slightest suspicion; and too often they identified religion with their own obscure impressions of the Middle Ages. Moreover, they could not realize the part played by the Church in opposing the strict objectivity of a dogmatic creed as a counterpoise to the self-assertion of man and the consequent individualism which tended towards anarchy.

Christianity had revealed the profound humanity, that is, spirituality, of the world, and man feeling himself the agent of God on earth had begun to realize more or less clearly his personal importance. Only God remained above him and beyond him, only the idea that God's presence is in him and yet outside him and beyond him could give to law that objectivity which it must possess in order to be binding. It is not the decalogue or the Church's precepts which are here referred to, but the recognition of an infinite reality as the basis of all religious experience, for it makes man aware of his own limitations and at the same time gives him the power to transcend those limitations of which he has become conscious. Abstract self-assertion blinds us to the importance of all that constitutes the not-us, that is, the world. Of the practical relation between ourselves and the world, the first term, implying consciousness, is the more important, and St. Paul, like all the writers of the New Testament, has rightly laid stress on the fact. The *charitas sibi*, however, is the infinite force that raises the subject and raises us, and enlarges our capacity, until we are capable of taking in the object, all that we are not, the world or, philosophically speaking, the not-self. When man does realize such an objectivity, such a distinction between himself and the world, his attitude is one of reverence not only towards God but also towards the world. His whole outlook, whether theoretical or practical, is coloured by religion, and he asserts his liberty in the very act by which he accepts the law, which thus springs from within.

Historically we know that this view of religion is a



Christian intuition, and has been acted upon for twenty centuries by thousands of people; but philosophically it could not have been conceived without a knowledge of the works of Vico, Kant, Hegel, Croce, and, above all, Gentile. It is by no means medieval; and the philosophy of enlightenment with its abstract individualism is one of the stages through which men had to pass in order to conceive a subject capable of comprehending the object without going back to pagan realism. For to be the world of God this world must be objective; but if man is to act in it as the agent and collaborator of God it must be of a subjective objectivity. To remain Christian it must remain human, the realm of the subject whose religious recognition of the not-self is for him the supreme self-assertion.

To see this clearly the life of the mind had to be analysed in its three aspects: first, that of the object, where we meet religion and law prevailing, with St. Thomas Aquinas as its greatest exponent; second, that of the subject, free in its self-determined world, with art and liberty prevailing and Machiavelli and Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley as its greatest exponents; thirdly, that of the synthesis of the first two, with science and philosophy prevailing, and Kant, Hegel, and the Idealists as its exponents. On the other hand it was no less necessary that all their conclusions should be seen in the unity of the living dialectic, that is, in history, i.e. experience; for there religion appears as actually imbuing life with the sense of law, just as art imbues it with the sense of liberty characteristic of the whole of our modern world. This seems to have been made possible by Giovanni Gentile continuing the work of Giambattista Vico. Without the one-sidedness of the philosophy of the enlightenment, without its abstractness of view, the reaction vaguely initiated by Rousseau and vigorously furthered by Kant could not have taken place, since its roots are to be detected all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France and

England. Vico, however, had already seen it before the inconsistency of the one school and the abstractness of the other had betrayed the one-sidedness of their speculation. He indeed effectively forecast most of what has since been done, long after he himself laid down his pen, by Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Croce, and Gentile towards the correction of earlier and cruder views of Religion and morals.

## CHAPTER VI

### VICO AND ROUSSEAU AGAINST RATIONALISM

THE studies of Giambattista Vico made by Croce and Gentile<sup>1</sup> are so complete that it is impossible here to offer any criticism of him that could be at once both just and original; not that Vico's philosophy has been exhausted as a subject for research and criticism; but we cannot in this essay consider anything among the amazing riches of his writings that is not immediately relevant to the conclusion of our inquiry. We acknowledge, then, once for all that in describing here the notion of religion drawn from Vico's works we are bound to follow and practically repeat what has already been said by Croce and Gentile.

Vico is the most Italian of all the thinkers of Italy; yet a close survey of his ideas soon reveals that side by side with the most Italian of intellectual heirlooms there exist in his works the deepest and richest tendencies of the modern philosophy of Europe, be it French, English, or German. He is thus an excellent illustration of his own theory that in the speculative mind the most concrete historical determinations blend with the broadest universality of ideas. At the time when he studied and wrote, Italy was impregnated with foreign, and especially with French, culture. It was a period in which Italians were eagerly assimilating foreign culture, so that it cannot be said that he was sentimentally regarded by his countrymen as a national hero. It was also a period in which foreigners were willing to recognize and appreciate Italian thinkers, among whom none can be considered a better citizen of the intellectual world than Vico. It seems, therefore, difficult to account for the fact that he was so little understood both in Italy and abroad; and it has naturally enough been

<sup>1</sup> See Benedetto Croce, *La Filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, Bari, Laterza, 1911; Giovanni Gentile, *Studi Vichiani*, Messina, Principato.

suggested that he was not Italian in the same way as the other thinkers and artists then flourishing in Italy.

While his countrymen were living upon the contribution made to philosophy by France and England, Vico opposed the idealistic view of history as the developing process of mankind to the naturalistic view, which implies at first absolute individualism in morals and politics—and so entirely prevents any speculative conception of religion; and subsequently entails the no less absolute negation of the individual, thereby causing religion to be persecuted as the strongest ground of individual liberty. Again, he opposed that self-generated progress of mankind which continues to create its own world, as the realization of the aims of providence, to the abstract contemplation of clear ideas which were the matter of mathematical intuition and deduction. In this he showed himself the lineal descendant of the Italian humanists and men of the Renaissance, therefore an anachronism. This was nearly fatal to his work, for it put him as a writer in a position of great inferiority to Descartes and Locke. He never dealt directly with the question which was the real object of his speculations because he never realized beforehand where he was going, and it was only on the way that he became definitely conscious of the problem which was driving him, hence his obscurity. For instance, starting to write a philosophy of history, as Michelet took his *Scienza Nuova* to be, and beginning as a good Platonist, he became involved in the deepest speculation on the nature of man's mind, quite in contradiction to the doctrine of Plato. He had begun by considering the origin of man's actual activity—obviously a difficult matter to determine—but this led him to observe casually that, however obscure the question seemed, the inquirer was always guided by the steady light of the conviction that the gentile world is the achievement of men; and that its principles must, therefore, be found in the nature of our human mind and in the force

of our understanding.<sup>1</sup> This proclamation of man's power to create his own world, the only historical world, was indeed revolutionary. Rousseau's theories, evolved forty years later, claiming man's liberty to arrange society to suit his own requirements, are not bolder than this sublime conception of a Catholic thinker, childlike in his humility and simplicity of heart. He was not unaware of the importance of his work: he knew that it meant revolution; but the consciousness he had of his speculative genius never led him to cast away the simplicity and humility of the believer.

The qualities of the philosopher were in him grafted on to those of an eminent jurist and historian. What mathematics were to Descartes and physics to others, law, history, archaeology, and literature were to him; and it is little wonder, therefore, that by means of historical researches which were meant to yield a philosophy of history he went on to build a philosophy of mind. It may be useful to add, before starting to expound the forms of mind's activity for which he claims historical and philosophical importance, that in his strong reaction against the systems of philosophy then in fashion, Vico's criticism or defence was always dialectical. Either he contradicted the principal theses of his favourite authors just as he contradicted those of Descartes, to whom he was most bitterly opposed, or he accepted them only to transform them.

French rationalism and English empiricism seemed to agree in extending the psychology of their time and countries to every period of the past and to every country in the world. Cartesianism was repelled by the wild forest of history and tended towards the abstract and universalizing forms of knowledge. Vico, on the other hand, was attracted by those periods of history which were most remote from the psychology of his time. He was thus led

<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Ferrari's edition of Giambattista Vico's *Opere*, Milan, 1835, vol. iii, p. 23; vol. iv, p. 36; vol. v, pp. 168-9, 238.

to study the inferior manifestations of mind, such as imagination, violence, and simplicity, whereas the exponents of Natural Law had meditated only upon the nature of man as they found it refined by religion and by laws. Since this led them to ground their theories on man's mature intellect, whilst they ignored the imagination of his youth, or on his will when morally trained, whilst they overlooked the wild passions of his earlier days, they found it easy to postulate man or the nature of man as a static datum. Not so Vico. Many years before they were proclaimed he came to reject the theory of man's natural rights on the ground that it required the assumption of a false notion of human nature; whilst he has given concrete ground to the assertion of man's spiritual rights as springing from his duties, by tracing the creative activity of human mind all through historical reality.

Art, or, as he calls it, poetry, was not born of man's capricious desire to give pleasure or to adorn philosophic sayings: it was born of natural necessity, and is the first operation of man's mind. Man, before he conceives a universal notion, such as 'table' or 'dog', realizes it by the operation not of the intellect but of the imagination. Before he reflects with the intellect alone he perceives with emotion; before he can think in prose he speaks in verse. In short, the nearer poetry keeps to the particular the more poetic it is, and the higher reflection rises towards the universal the more intellectual it is. Thus poets are the senses of mankind and philosophy its intellect. Such statements of Vico agree with that of the schoolmen: *Nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*; since without poetry philosophy and civilization are impossible. After the expression of various often contradictory views, he comes to his real conception, which undoubtedly is, that the first form of mind is poetry, that is, art, *free from reflection and reason, and therefore anterior to what we should call logical activity*—a view which, as it stands, cannot be

endorsed by modern philosophy, to which it is known under that form as Hegelian.<sup>1</sup>

Mythology is another form of mind, and in his notion of what constitutes a myth Vico triumphs over both allegorism and euphemerism. Myths need not inevitably refer to real men, but they are essentially historical, that is, truth under the form which it is wont to take in primitive minds. The subject of a myth may be an individual, such as Heracles, and accomplish individual actions, killing the Hydra or cleansing the Augean stables; but even then it will also be a concept, the notion of useful and glorious activity. It is therefore both a universal as the expression of a concept and a creation of man's imagination in what characterizes it as an individual.<sup>2</sup>

Passing to morality and to society, it is necessary merely to note that although Vico too reacted against rationalism, as Rousseau did later, the contributions of these two thinkers to philosophy are of very different characters. The circumstances in which they wrote were very different, and this alone would be sufficient to account for the difference between their theories; but as individuals they were diametrically opposed—in temper, in training, and in their way of life. Vico as a child, a student, a young tutor, and a Professor of Rhetoric, lived continuously in Naples or in the Neapolitan provinces. He had an excellent intellectual training in history, law, literature, archaeology, philosophy, and, to a limited extent, in natural science. He had not the wandering childhood of Rousseau nor his experience as a footman; but we know that when he became a tutor he was a conscientious one, and that he must have won the respect of those with whom he came in contact by his true love of learning. Undoubtedly Rousseau's place in the history of educational theory is an important one, yet it is Vico who was in actual fact the good tutor and father. The fact is that Rousseau's thinking suffers from

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. v, *Della Sapienza Poetica*, bks. i and ii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

the same vagueness as Vico's writing. Rousseau's way of conceiving God, the general will, or the human mind is indefinite and vague; but the works which contain such intuitions—for they remain such—are written in a style which is delightfully crisp and definite. Moreover, he writes with passion, and can therefore be read often with passion, always with interest. Vico, on the other hand, has left a few conceptions—powerful, definite, true to actual experience; but his works are obscure, baffling, and badly written, and require a considerable amount of learning in the reader to make them intelligible. From the point of view of worldly success there could be little competition between them, and while the one enjoyed fame and the friendship of illustrious people in complete forgetfulness of all domestic obligations, the other led the life of an unknown scholar overwhelmed by the cares of a numerous family.

The essential difference between them is, however, due to the sources from which each drew his inspiration. Vico's source is history—history of law and institutions, of literature and monuments; but it is equally the actual experience of everyday life in relation to his surroundings. Rousseau's source is himself, and therefore his unparalleled genius is bound to be limited by the dreamy character of all his meditations. What they have in common can be briefly stated. They both attempt to recall attention to the importance of the universal in human experience and to obtain a proper theoretical recognition of belief, intuition, and feeling.

In spite of the quarter of a century that had elapsed since the publication of the *Scienza Nuova*, Rousseau's works show no trace of Vico's influence. It is even probable that had he had the opportunity of reading the book and sufficient learning to understand it, Rousseau would not have appreciated a writer who thus turned away from himself and as it were stood back in order to see man in the



infinite panorama of history and daily experience. In his concentration on the present and his abstraction from everything that was not himself, Rousseau was in perfect harmony with his contemporaries, whom he surpassed only in his intuitive but powerful genius. Like them he conceived political philosophy in a scientific manner, except when he was inspired by his personal mysticism, and even then he tried to reduce the general will to a mathematical question of *plus* and *minus*. Vico, taking his stand on history, literature, archaeology, and, above all, on law, rejects without hesitation the golden age of the State of Nature as a mythological fiction; while Rousseau, by contenting himself with saying that perhaps it never has existed, and never will exist, keeps it as a fruitful hypothesis. The initial stage of mankind is for the Neapolitan writer an obscure period in which man did not differ much from the wild beasts, and was in any case an irrational and non-intellectual being.

In rejecting the myth of a primitive state of nature, Vico was undermining all the theories of the school of Natural Law; but this does not prevent him from counting Hugo Grotius as one of his four favourite authors. The fact is that, though he rejected the ground of such speculation, he must have felt the true importance of the movement. First, it was identified with social progress; and then in the consciousness that had prompted it there was, side by side with the incipient anti-clericalism, the growing recognition of the political coming-of-age of the middle classes. If the natural was opposed to the supernatural, which was supposed to have been dominant all through the Middle Ages, it also stood for what was considered common to men of all lands and all times. On the other hand, Philosophy had been brought to some extent to consider nature, or ultimate reality, as physical nature, and thus often put man on a level with any other kind of animal, in that his actions were considered subject to the

unalterable laws of nature. Thus it was impossible for the system of Grotius and his followers to be anything more than a popular and easy empiricism, and their theory of morals could only be a more or less veiled utilitarianism.<sup>1</sup>

Against all this Vico fought a strenuous battle, while at the same time he developed the great and immortal conception that lay at the core of such theories, namely, that society is immanent in man. This was indeed no new idea. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and before them, though in a different way, Aristotle, had considered society as necessary to the development of man's best nature, that is, to the development of his spiritual character. But only St. Augustine had given to this conception something that could transform it into a regulative ideal.

We are often told how miners go down into the black pit with little lanterns attached to their caps. The light is always thrown the same distance ahead of them; advancing as they advance it is always in front of them; since it comes from them, its position is always determined by their own position. It is necessary that it should be so in order to guide their way. Though crude, this seems the best parable of a regulative ideal. It springs from us, yet it transcends us. We can never reach it, because as we advance it advances too. As we improve it grows better. As we ascend the steep hill it rises higher and higher.

Until Kant, philosophy had not given any satisfactory account of this. But Vico and Rousseau knew St. Augustine, and they had found in his work, if not the theory of the regulative ideal, at least the regulative ideal at work. Our ideas of God, of perfection, of ultimate reality determines the nature of our regulative ideals. Thus if physical nature is the last and ultimate form of reality, the morals of the Stoics are the highest that we can attain, and liberty will only be the lack of extrinsic compulsion. With this Vico's

<sup>1</sup> See Vico's criticisms on the point: op. cit., vol. iii, *De Universi juris uno principio et fine uno*, bk. i.

Latin but modern, that is Catholic, individualism cannot be satisfied. Vico needs another kind of liberty—the liberty of the individual, which does not stop at the limits set by the liberties of other men to its own; but which, on the contrary, feeds on its own limitation, and realizes itself in accepting limits which it *ipso facto* transcends by the act of acceptance. Without this liberty no *progressus ad infinitum* is possible; but this liberty can only be based on a conception of man as spirit, on a conception of the nature of man as spiritual and not material. Vico and Rousseau meet here. That the individual is absolutely free within the limits of the state is not a paradox: it is merely that the *good citizen* wills with the *general will*. This being a regulative ideal, the *good citizen* as such does not exist, but a man is a good citizen in so far as he approximates to that ideal, and he is free in so far as his will approximates to the *general will*.

## CHAPTER VII

### HUMAN LIBERTY LIMITED AND TRANSCENDENTAL

UTILITARIANISM is the target on which Vico concentrates his fire, and it is by fighting it under the form which it had received from Hobbes and Spinoza that he comes to the notion of religion which was then so strikingly original. To him, a man who had spent some ten years in studying the origin of law and society, utilitarianism is a mere slander or else an abominable error.<sup>1</sup> It is based on a notion of mankind that puts man on the same level as the beasts, for it abstracts from the higher side of mankind. Utility cannot be a sufficient ground for morals, since it springs from the temporal and empirical part of man, whilst morals are grounded on what is eternal and transcendental in him.

No utilitarian principle, whatever the forms ascribed to it by philosophers, can justify the process of differentiation by which social organisms develop. Deceit, force, need imply as already in existence the society they are supposed to have produced. How could the supposedly happy and simple first owners of the soil have been deceived into giving up their rights if they had had no desire whatever and no relation of any kind? For relations imply some kind of social state even if only tacitly agreed upon. As for force, the first rulers were not merely strong in their individual power; their influence had a far deeper root, since they invariably appear at first as protectors of the weak and as antagonists of all anti-social and destructive tendencies. Their law was force indeed, but force *a natura praestantiori dictata*. The immediate ground of society is therefore moral and as such essentially spiritual. Vico's familiarity with history was bound to bring him into conflict with theorizers who turned away from history and

<sup>1</sup> See Giuseppe Ferrari's edition of Giambattista Vico's *Opere* above mentioned, vol. v, *Principi di una Scienza Nuova*, bk. i.

freely constructed a new notion of man. On the other hand, his critical sense was not maimed by his reverence for antiquity. The Roman jurists whom he so venerated owed much of their prestige to the splendid pomp of their prose, and their ethics are little more than the perfect art of a well-balanced equity. Vico realized this fact as clearly as he realized that, were the principles of Grotius to be submitted to close criticism, they would certainly appear rather probable than logically necessary.<sup>1</sup>

At first sight, however, his view of the origin of law and society appears very much akin to that of Grotius' School, owing to his use of the word 'natural'; but as soon as it is understood that Vico's notion of man's nature is that of the Church, that is to say, the Christian and spiritual notion, the difference is quite apparent. The fact that Vico is a Roman Catholic, and very anxious to show himself as such in his writings, is responsible for a good deal that is characteristic in his teaching. We shall see later that Hegel and Gentile, though free from such pre-occupation, were also deeply influenced by the teaching of their respective Churches, even when they thought less about it. Vico when he was a tutor (1686-95) studied the problem of Grace, and in his *Autobiografia* he tells us that he became much involved in the Catholic doctrine on this question, especially when studying the views of a theologian of the Sorbonne whom he calls Ricardo. He sums up these views in a most genial manner:

'Following a Geometrical method, he [that is Étienne Dechamps, S.J., whom he calls Ricardo] shows that the doctrine of St. Augustine is equally distant from that of Calvin and that of Pelagius . . . ; this leads him to meditate upon and formulate a principle of natural law common to all nations, which is useful in explaining the origins of Roman law and of any other civil law of the Gentiles in respect of history, and is consistent with the healthy doctrine of Grace in respect of morals.'

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. iii, *De uno universi juris principio et fine uno*, bk. i.

That principle, obviously enough, must be a conception of liberty. To know what it was we have only to remember that Antonius Richardus was a French Jesuit, Étienne Dechamps (1613-1701), whose polemical works were published during the struggles between Jansenists and Jesuits. According to the doctrine ascribed to Jansenius, free will is incompatible with grace. Pelagius is supposed to have introduced into Christianity the doctrine of free will taken from the ancient philosophers. To this Father Dechamps retorts, first, that it is quite possible to reconcile liberty and grace; secondly, that St. Augustine has not condemned any conception of liberty; and, thirdly, that one must keep to the view which, though Pascal may ridicule it, is alone human, that man is free owing to the opposition in him of a sufficient grace—which is not sufficient in itself—to the tendencies that lead him astray. For the Jansenists man was absolutely free before the Fall, in consequence of which he was absolutely enslaved; he is freed by redemption and by grace, unconditionally saved, *if one of the elect*. According to this conception there can be no struggle, because man can only be in one of two definite and distinct states, and in any case the Cause is always acting in perfect independence of man and altogether outside him. With Father Dechamps the Cause is indeed outside, but it is within as well.<sup>1</sup> Like all his school, he combines the immanence stressed by the Christian mystics with the transcendence stressed by the theologians, and thus goes as near as possible to understanding the nature of what is neither purely immanent nor purely transcendent but transcendental. In the light of such theories the importance of the struggle in moral life and the difficulties presented by actual circumstances appear as necessary to liberty as fuel is to fire. The fire is fire in so far as it destroys the fuel as such. Man is free in so far

<sup>1</sup> Antonius Richardus, *De haeresi Janseniana ab apostolica sede merito proscripta*, 2nd ed., Lutetiae, Cramoisy, 1654.

as he overcomes the limits of his liberty *qua* limits; but the fuel and the limits are necessary elements respectively of fire and of liberty, since fire is combustion of fuel, and liberty is man's triumph over the limits that circumstances set to his act—a triumph that implies his comprehending and transcending them in each actual case.

Man's soul is the scene of a struggle, or rather is the struggle itself between good and evil, and it is for this reason that so many philosophers have mistaken him for a god and so many others for a beast, whilst a few have understood that both meet in him. Vico certainly interprets St. Augustine and the French doctrine as professed in the Sorbonne in a very original manner; but he keeps sufficiently close to it to retain the necessity for grace. This puts him in a position of great advantage compared with his contemporaries and even with Rousseau, for it enables him to do justice to the presence of the universal in man and in every human act. He can avoid both the excessive objectivity of the Jansenist morality and the excessive subjectivity of the utilitarian. He compares the former to the morality of the Stoics who, according to him, desire the death of the senses; and it is in his reaction against utilitarianism that we see best how the conception of grace, as the universal in the individual, enables him to anticipate the general will of Rousseau and the transcendental self of Kant.<sup>1</sup>

This way of understanding man as at once free and limited, free because limited and self-limited because he is free, leads Vico to conceive of law as natural to man. What is not natural cannot last, and law is everywhere and always in the human world of history. Fear is certainly the origin of society;<sup>2</sup> not, however, merely the fear of wild beasts or of hunger, but the fear of oneself, the fear of solitude and remorse and shame. What he terms fear we should probably call self-consciousness, the consciousness of a man's

own limitations, and this would equally include fear of wild beasts or of hunger and fear of wild impulses. In any case, out of shame Vico sees arising the sense of honour, thrift, probity, trust in promises, truth in word, honesty in deed. Society is thus born of morality, which in its turn is born of *pudor*;<sup>1</sup> and he can consider society as the realization of man's best nature and of man's spiritual conscience. This sense of shame might be called the sense common to all men, the sense that enables them to recognize without formal judgement what is right or useful.

Obviously this is very near Rousseau; yet it is not Rousseau. The priority of this feeling to moral or intellectual judgement does not make it equivalent to the *sentiment* of Rousseau, an obscure and vague notion most unlike Vico. He insists on the priority of *pudor* merely to enforce the claim of spontaneity; for this quality is necessary to account for the evolution of manners and customs common to different peoples without being copied from the one by the other.

According to Vico, it is through this sense of decency or shame that the moral consciousness is enabled to embody itself in institutions and thereby give stability and certitude to the free will of man which is in its nature uncertain. It is obvious, however, that we cannot leave it at that. For us it is indeed self-consciousness, but self-consciousness both moral and practical which embodies itself in historical institutions. If we watch the development of self-consciousness in a child we are forced to agree with Vico. The word self-consciousness seems at first sight to mean, in the acceptance given to it by common language, that the child's uneasiness of manner is due to his concentration on himself. Yet further consideration shows that he tries to please his elders, attract their notice, or appease their indignation when he feels guilty; simply because he

<sup>1</sup> On *pudor*, vol. iii, pp. 28, 51, 153, 188, 189, 190, 197; vol. iv, pp. 55, 56; vol. v, p. 258.



has realized the importance of his surroundings, that is, of his not-self, and therewith the limitation of his own self. Philosophy can see no contradiction there. Self-consciousness implies consciousness of the not-self. For the *Ego* without the rest of the world, in opposition to which I am myself, means nothing at all.

Thus the self-awe in which Vico sees the first origin of society is the consciousness man has of his not-self, of the exterior world, or, to use an image, of the immense shadow that surrounds him and is in reality his own negative aspect, all that which *he* is not. So that if man knows shame and remorse even in the most absolute solitude, it is because even there he sees himself as it were against this same mysterious background.

## CHAPTER VIII

### RELIGION THE GROUND OF LIBERTY AND LAW

Vico's view may appear nothing more than a fruitful working hypothesis. History, however, supports it, for primitive men do wander about savage and ferocious, without family ties or matrimonial bonds, a prey to the wildest passions. Whence could they receive the law that would prevent their mutual destruction? They could not be saved by the wisdom of men, since human wisdom did not, or does not, exist as yet for them. Nor could they be saved by God. Through his faithful acceptance of the Scriptures Vico was led to consider in a purely historical and philosophical way the origin of society among the Gentiles. God, he thought, had retired among His chosen people, and left the rest of mankind to its fate; but He had not deprived them of human character, and their humanity was sufficient to save them. Thunder perhaps would strike them with the consciousness of their helplessness in face of natural phenomena, and consequently impress them with a sense of their own limitations, thus suggesting the confused and obscure notion of that which is not limited. They long for harmonious relations with this infinite, and are led to the observance of various ceremonies and taboos. They refrain, that is to say, from satisfying some of their physical cravings, and they thus overcome them, and win liberty of mind as a result. Thus *liberty* with its twin sister *law* is born of the fear of God and out of the awe-inspiring consciousness of the not-self. As Vico puts it, following Lucretius, the land becomes covered with altars; the caves behold the union of men and women now bashful of their meetings under the starry canopy of heaven and eager to ensure divine favour for their nuptials; the soil is broken to receive the bodies of the dead who return to the gods.

Ethics is born with the three fundamental institutions of society—the cult of the Deity, matrimony as the first germ of society, the veneration of the dead as the first assertion of immortality.

This moral power of the idea of God is to be felt throughout history in the life of nations, as well as in the development of the individual, and it is absurd, or at least devoid of historical justification, to imagine morality and civilization without religion.

*Vico does not explain in detail the relations between theory and practice, between intellect and will, for since they coincide in God so they must in man, God's image. Indeed his view of religion seems mainly due to this notion that thought and will interpenetrate and form one single whole.* It is indeed the position of a man who knew history sufficiently to see in it a kind of panorama displaying itself in time and space; so that in spite of the limitations of his information, in spite of the many fantastic deductions he draws from such data, and in spite also of his sociological blunders, he is able to grasp the life of mind in its eternal elements; thereby forecasting much of what has been discovered long after he meditated upon the essential laws of history.

A little more than a century after Vico another Neapolitan, Francesco de Sanctis, was to test this assertion in the case of the history of Italy, and the answer of ten or twelve centuries was such that, although a strong anticlerical in politics, he never in his whole history of literature wrote a single word against the Church. There, as he traces the history of the life of the spirit in Italy during seven or eight centuries, we can see that when the religious consciousness dies out or disappears the conceptions of family, society, City or State become mere empty words. It is now sufficiently clear, firstly, that for Vico religion is a conception of reality, and as such the very essence of truth, and, secondly, that for him it belongs to practical reality as the basis of ethics, and is as such the very essence

of ethics. In Gentile's theory we shall find it as an essential form in the life of mind, that of the recognition of the not-self, and as such the ground of all moral problems.

Since the eternal significance of religion is historically proved apart from any particular revelation, Vico in his search for the ground of morality could dispense with the consideration of any positive religious doctrines; but it was impossible for him to avoid the consideration of the part they played in the world of experience. Plutarch, after describing the primitive religions and their horrors, wonders if it would not have been better for men to have had no religion than to worship the gods in such impious ways; but Vico, after quoting him, observes that surely when he wrote this page he must have lost sight of the fact that from such atrocious superstitions human civilization did in time develop, whereas nothing ever grew out of atheism. There is no such thing in history or society as life without a religion, rational or fantastic, full either of tenderness or of ferocity, but in any case providing man with the idea, more or less clear, more or less noble, of something which transcends individuals, in which all individuals are welded into one, and which provides man's morality with the object of his moral will, which is law. Thus religion can be identified under its theoretical form with the immediate consciousness of truth, the ground of morality, and under its practical form with morality itself. It is now easy to realize why Vico criticized both Grotius and Pufendorf for the false notion of religion which led them to misrepresent the true nature of man, society, and law.

The religious feeling that overtakes man when he realizes the insignificance of the self as compared with the not-self gives rise to a poetic metaphysic,<sup>1</sup> an intuitive form of moral consciousness, a form of law that is not

<sup>1</sup> See Giuseppe Ferrari's edition of Giambattista Vico's *Opere* above mentioned, vol. iii, pp. 209, 216, 264, 266; vol. iv, pp. 91, 185, 186; vol. v, pp. 106, 108.

expressed in words. The religious conception as we find it in periods of higher civilization implies a logical and metaphysical elaboration, which in its theoretical form is with scientific theories the ground of technical philosophy, and in its practical form that of the relation between man and the world.<sup>1</sup> Now in his conception of very primitive times Vico was much nearer to the Bible than the protestant Grotius and his followers had been. He accepted the distinction between Jews and Gentiles as implying that the latter were utterly destitute of the supernatural help bestowed on the former; and he thought of them as being in a kind of premoral state, that is to say, a state devoid indeed of morality but full of moral potentialities through the realization of which mankind as we know it emerged. Such realization is not the effect of divine grace. It is natural, and due merely to the use of the natural light granted to every man; but man's free will is weak, and, torn between passion and law, might easily succumb were it not supported by providence. Vico makes an absolute distinction between the grace of God and providence.<sup>2</sup> The grace of God, in which he firmly believes, is an extraordinary help granted to some men, and particularly to the chosen people. Providence is the ordinary help of God granted to all men as their birthright, and inherent in their nature as men. In short it is what might be termed by the non-Christian thinkers the rationality of history working itself out through the activity of individual minds.

Whatever the uncertainty of Vico's notion, due to the way in which with no philosophical antecedents he reached so final and philosophical a conception of religion, there can be no doubt that he was thenceforward the best antidote to the abstractness of Anglo-French speculation. The philosophy of mind had yet to be developed; but it was sufficiently asserted in the *Scienza Nuova* to claim man and all his activities as belonging to a reality that was spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. iv, pp. 180, 219, 220.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., iii, pp. 190, 193.

as well as historical. Thus Vico's providence provided the ground for a more concrete, that is to say, a more human and more spiritual, notion of liberty, just at the time when the men who were to popularize illuminism were preparing for their task. Vico's, however, was not only a far more difficult idea than theirs, it was also far less palatable; for his liberty, springing as it does from religion hand in hand with law, is a double-faced divinity. According to such a conception of life, man can never have liberty without law, or claim a right without pledging himself to a duty. Before the rights of man were proclaimed they had been balanced by a declaration of his duties. To be in accordance with the facts the proclamation should have been headed 'Rights and duties of man'. As it was, the abstract one-sidedness of that proclamation did not prevent its being acted upon for more than a century, because the religious life of previous generations had prepared much of the way that has been trodden since.

Now that Vico's work has been made accessible by the subsequent work of five or six men, it is possible to realize with him that religion is an essential factor in man's spiritual life, that it does not belong merely to practical reality, as was held in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and last but not least that since it is the ground of morality, liberty can no more exist without law than light without shade. It is amazing to see how Vico's veneration for his favourite authors can turn unconsciously to opposition even when he is following one of his most sympathetic trains of thought. In his view of the philosophy of law he is supposed to follow Plato; but the conception of an eternal and universal system of laws could only be realized in a Utopia, and Vico cannot help revolting from Plato's *Republic*, which is a work of imagination, and so from Vico's point of view necessarily non-moral, like all systems of law which are created by abstracting from the historical world; since morality is

found only in the actual relations of men, it cannot have any other reality but that which it acquires in that world, understood as the whole system of men's mutual intercourse. So after accepting Plato's ideal republic, he entirely demolishes it in order to produce a completely different conception of his own. The only real eternal republic is the eternal process of experience we know as history in all the succession and variety of its modes of development. Every new discovery of truth has its practical manifestations and consequences; to think along certain lines involves living and acting along the same lines. The sharp division between theory and practice is completely gone; but the division itself must wait for Gentile before it can be historically accounted for and philosophically disposed of, although most of the best Italians of the nineteenth century have actually lived and thought in this manner.

## CHAPTER IX

### HEGEL'S MISUNDERSTANDING OF ROMANTICISM

It has often been and is still said that in his philosophy of religion Hegel was much influenced by practical considerations, and his relation to the crown of Prussia is supposed to have affected his view of religion.<sup>1</sup> If that were so, his ideas could be of little use here; but as a matter of fact it is mere gossip, and is refuted at once when we read his *Phenomenology* and his *Logic*, as any one must who wishes to understand his theory of religion. In these two works all that is vital in his early religious writings has been preserved; and what he owes to Eckardt's mysticism or to his own religious experience has not been overlooked here. It is merely held that wherever his system differs from his previous works so does his more mature theory of religion and his final view of its relation to philosophy. His doctrine on the subject of religion is all of a piece with his theory of knowledge, and such slight divergences as may be found are easily accounted for by his polemical attitude towards what he calls the principles of the time. This will be easily understood if a first outline of his conception of religion is sought in his *Logic*, where it will be found obviously determined by the central conception of his philosophy.

On the very threshold of his *Logic* there is a statement indicating the fundamental characteristic of his notion of art and religion: 'If it be correct to say that thought makes the distinction between man and the lower animals, then everything human is human, for the sole and simple reason that it is due to the operation of thought.'<sup>2</sup> With this it is clear that Hegel wishes to oppose on the one hand the

<sup>1</sup> See Croce, *Critica*, March 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Logic*, Eng. trans., Clarendon Press, 1892, p. 4; *Sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgart, 1929, vol. viii, p. 4.



theories of art and religion brought to light by romanticism, and on the other those produced by the philosophy of enlightenment, the former of which were a reaction against the latter. In the opinion of Hegel the fundamental error was the same in both cases. Religion seemed to him to be no less underestimated by those who understood it as feeling than by those who relegated it to the realm of practice. He therefore begins his attack on both Schleiermacher and Jacobi by stressing the fact that thought is the touchstone which enables us to discriminate between what is human and what is not human. Indeed he does not regard feeling as something which is not human; but he maintains that the romantics were wrong in believing that the presence of thought in religion must impair or destroy religious feeling, and still more in considering religious feeling as the opposite of thought. People might consider religion to be a matter of sentiment, so long as they remembered that sentiment involves thought as well as feeling, and that the reason why man alone is capable of religion, law, and morality is that he alone can think.

Hegel considers that the opposition of the Romantic School to thought is due to the destructive tendencies of certain eighteenth-century schools of philosophy. He does not see that abstract individualism is the root of the evil against which Rousseau first upheld sentiment as a universalizing force; and he argues that the destructive philosophy of such schools is not thought itself but reflective thought, which is an aftermath of thought proper. This distinction between thought and criticism, empirical or rational, is anything but illuminating, and it is necessary to examine carefully what Hegel means by 'thought'.

According to him, it is because man thinks that he alone possesses law, religion, and morality: In these the activity and products of his thinking are contained.<sup>1</sup> But when he

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., p. 4; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, p. 43.

asks himself what is the object of logic, he sees that thought may mean very much or very little. When people say of something, 'It is only a thought', it is obviously for them purely subjective, arbitrary, and accidental, and as such to be distinguished from the thing of which it is the thought, the thing alone being true, real, and objective. On the contrary, thought is raised to the highest honours when it is granted the exclusive privilege of grasping the nature of God, and generally speaking of all the super-sensuous: 'God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.' Hegel considers that the religious relation of man to God is one of thought, and he supports this by saying that the merely felt, the sensible, is not usually considered to be spiritual. This argument is not at all adequate to justify his assumption, and while it is an excellent illustration of what he means by thought, it carries the misleading implication that the religious feeling so much made of by the romantics is the merely felt, the sensible, the non-spiritual.

Only spirit can know spirit; of that Hegel is sure; but he is afraid of the retort that spirit can lower itself into feeling and sense, and this fear leads him to the very awkward assertion that this 'is the case in religion'.<sup>1</sup> He tries to overcome the difficulty by arguing that mere feeling as a mode of consciousness is one thing and its content another. Mere feeling as such links man to the brutes. Although it may apprehend the full organic truth, it does not really possess it, because the form of such apprehension is not congruous with its content. Spiritual existence, God himself, is not to be grasped by this lowest of the spiritual forms, but only by thought and as thought. Strictly speaking, thought is the sole mode of apprehending the eternal and the absolute.<sup>2</sup>

Hegel is here involved in a grave historical error.

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., p. 33; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, p. 470.

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *ibid.*, p. 34; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, pp. 70-1.

Apparently he did not know Rousseau well. He is dealing here with what Pascal and Rousseau had called instinct, and had opposed to the analytic, atomistic character of rational knowledge as the longing for an intuition of the universal. That French *sentiment* or *instinct* which draws man beyond his particular experiences and beyond the precincts of scientific learning, which makes him overcome his utilitarianism and is nothing but his natural longing for the divine, *amor Dei intellectualis*, had perhaps been degraded into feeling by the German Romantic school; but this mistake had been avoided by Jacobi. According to the Preface contained in the first volume of the Leipzig edition of his work<sup>1</sup> he calls *instinct*

'the energy which spontaneously determines the character of the self-activity in terms of which we must conceive every species of life as consisting of the activity of its own peculiar existence, which activity is self-generated, independent in its operation and continuous (without considering what has as yet not been experienced, namely, pleasure and pain). Inasmuch as living creatures are regarded from the point of view of their *rational* qualities only, the instinct of sensuous-rational, that is, speech-producing, creatures tends to the preservation and heightening of *personal* existence (that is, *self-consciousness*, the *unity* of consciousness that results from continuous and *thoroughgoing* concatenation); and therefore is incessantly directed towards all that furthers this.'<sup>2</sup>

This long statement is anything but clear, and does not come at all near Pascal's idea of instinct,<sup>3</sup> which he opposes, as a sign of our higher nature, to reason and experience, so that side by side with all our limitations '*nous avons un instinct que nous ne pouvons reprimer qui nous élève*'. When Pascal writes '*que deux choses instruisent l'homme de toute sa*

<sup>1</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, Fleischer, Leipzig, 1812, vol. i, pp. xii and xiii.

<sup>2</sup> See also in the edition of 1819, vol. iv, p. viii, 'Vorbericht zu Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an Moses Mendelssohn', where Jacobi referring to Allwill's *Briefsammlung* writes that it contains 'den ächten allgemeinen Schlüssel zu meinen Werken'; and speaking of the Preface commends it as illuminating for the reader.

<sup>3</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Brunschvicg [pensée 396].

*nature: l'instinct et l'expérience*', we understand perfectly that the former transcends the latter as the *a priori* of Kant will transcend the *a posteriori* a century later. Nothing is less ambiguous than his conception of instinct. Far from being mere feeling, sensation, and as such the source of what is inferior to reason, it is the tendency of reason to transcend itself, or rather to transcend those of its manifestations which are identified by Hegel himself under the name of understanding. Nevertheless, in spite of his obscurity, Jacobi's position is much nearer to that of Hegel, and it is strange that he should have been so misunderstood by him.

The latter, instead of considering what is meant by the sense of the divine, goes on with his examination of sense-knowledge, and states as characteristic of it the fact that it determines the individuality of the things we know. It would be difficult to find in the whole history of philosophy a deeper misunderstanding. Sense-knowledge does give individuality to the things we know; by determining what their differences are, it entails their mutual exclusion. Perceiving the green colour of a dress, I oppose it as green to all the dresses which are not green. Hegel, however, insists that none the less the attributes grasped by sense-knowledge are thoughts and general terms. Greenness is a general term. Thought appears thus as permeating the whole of sense-knowledge. In fact it is not a mere opposite of sense, for it does not leave sense outside itself as something extrinsic to it; being truly universal, thought is at once that other and itself. Language is for Hegel universal and the work of thought. It is for that reason that, as we have just stated, thought according to him is present throughout sense-knowledge, because all that is formulated in verbal form is thought. What I only feel is purely mine, he argues, and belongs to me; but it cannot be expressed in language, since this confers on what is expressed in it the character of universality; and

so I cannot say what I merely feel. The unutterable feeling or sensation, far from being the highest truth, is the most unimportant and untrue.<sup>1</sup>

All these technicalities were necessary in order to justify the view taken here as to the reason for which Hegel could not deal with the ineffable, the unutterable of the mystic. Thought for him includes every act of the mind; and this panlogism, joined with his erroneous theory of language, made his treatment of the non-rational forms of the life of mind far inferior to that which they had received at the hands of Vico. He cannot understand the positive value of the claims made by Schleiermacher and Jacobi. He does not see that what he calls mere feeling was not in their theory the merely felt, or even the emotional experience which more modern writers have sometimes mistaken for religion. They were revolting against discursive, analytic thought, just as Pascal and Rousseau had done, and as the whole Romantic School was doing and was to do. Through their treatment of religion and art they carried out the reaction which Kant had so strongly expressed against all analytic methods of thought, whether they lead to the dogmatism of metaphysics or to the scepticism of empirical thought. In either case analytic discursive thought appeared to them destructive of art and religion, just as it had appeared to Kant destructive of knowledge. Like him they sought the synthetic life of the spirit; but unlike him, though perhaps owing to his influence, they sought the reality of that life exclusively in the religious or artistic experience of the individual.

It is there that we find the justification of Hegel's violent attacks on their theories. Their subjectivism was not of the transcendental type. Their views, and even some of Kant's views on religion, were productive of a certain contempt for the objective element in positive

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., p. 38; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, p. 75.

religions. Church organization and theology come to be considered as accessories of religion; its essence was found exclusively in personal experience and independently of any definite object. Consequently their theories were harmful. In order to oppose the rational and empirical conceptions of religion, which considered church organization and the religion of which the churches are the historical embodiment as *unum et idem*, they fell into the opposite extreme, and in order to gain more religion they stripped it of any objective and historical character. Religion is indeed essentially personal experience; but what does the word *personal* mean more than that it must be the experience of a definite subject? The definiteness of the object is no less necessary than that of the subject. Hence the romantic theory of religion presents a one-sided view, and is harmful and misleading, as any half-truth is bound to be; but it would be unfair of us to misrepresent it as Hegel did, or even to pass over what he said without explanation.

The eighteenth century seemed to have undermined everything, and we cannot wonder that that thought could appear as a principle of destruction. Everything seemed to be tottering, and the human mind naturally enough sought an element of stability in religion. Hegel himself speaks of religion as of a sphere at the entrance to which man leaves behind him on the shore of time whatever awakens in him—doubt and fear, all sorrow, all care, all the limited interests of life. Like all religious people, when he speaks in this way he is moved by deep feeling. He often felt sincere devotion and reverence; although he seems to forget it when attacking Schleiermacher and Jacobi, the truth is that he was moved by the very same impulse which moved them. They were all longing for an element of stability. Hegel, however, realized that, in spite of their zeal, their philosophy was as dangerous to religion as that of the so-called enlightenment.

To make religion synonymous with individual re-

ligious experience is to put it beyond the reach of the majority of mankind. What can be definitely spoken of as religious or artistic or philosophic experience is confined to the very few; and of the three, religious experience is perhaps the most aristocratic, using that word in its original sense. We are all artistic, all religious, all philosophical; yet how few are those whose artistic experience is sufficiently intense to emerge from the context of life and take definite form, so as to make them realize explicitly the riches that are within their grasp! Fewer still, however, are those whose religious experience reaches explicit consciousness. Artistic achievement entails the translation into external form, if we may put it so, of the innermost artistic experience. Man contemplates his own artistic experience just as he lives it, and applause or criticism will make even more explicit what is already such by nature. Religious experience, on the other hand, certainly entails expression; but this is usually born and usually dies in the innermost recess of consciousness, where only those blessed with natural gifts or acquired training will perceive it. Unless the average man finds a social framework for his individual religious experience he will hardly be aware of it at all; and what is an experience of which no one is explicitly conscious? Whatever it may be, it is certainly not spiritual. The Spirit and the Word are one, even in their difference.

Because they feared the destructiveness of thought, the romantics shunned its discursiveness, and this led them to prefer what is implicit, indefinite, and unorganized to what is explicit, definite, and organized. That preference was bound to be fatal to the religion of the many. When the external form of religion is considered artificial and unessential, the mass of those who cannot distinguish between Spirit and Word lose sight of the Spirit when they discard the Word, and religion is bound to appear more and more a thing of the individual taken in his atomic particularity.

Hegel did not see, what Vico had already seen long before, that religion is the ground of moral and social law, because it is the recognition of the infinity of the not-self. Neither does he realize, as we now do long after, that religion leads man to transcend his individual and animal life, enabling him thereby to live his spiritual, rational, and human life in a world of which he feels and knows that he is part. He saw, however, and fully realized that truth and moral value are—that is, must be—universal; hence his reaction against the whole post-Rousseauian and post-Kantian theory of religion; and hence also his insistence on the fact that feeling cannot grasp anything objective. With many examples he illustrates the perpetual effort of reflection to grasp something permanent and objective, something self-sufficient and yet definite enough to act as a principle regulating the particulars. He concludes that this something must be universal, and that by definition it is out of the range of sense-knowledge, which can only give us the particular and never that which is considered by one and all as true and essential.<sup>1</sup> Here again he takes for granted what is really the false conclusion of an erroneous interpretation, namely, that the *sentiment* or instinct of the romantics is mere feeling, thereby turning into an irrational force what they meant to be the superrational tendency in man. In truth the fault is theirs. They insisted on the implicit, individual, subjective, and wholly immediate character of religious experience, thus making it indefinite, vague, and abstract; and consequently provoked this violent reaction on the part of Hegel. What is universal, he argues, is the very antithesis of what is merely immediate and individual in man's experience.

The opposition of mediated, rational knowledge to the immediate and direct apprehension which the romantics considered as the criterion by which we can test what is

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 42; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, pp. 78-9.



truly religious in our experience requires some explanation. Philosophy has long been familiar with it. We meet it in the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, of neo-Platonists and Christian mystics. Knowledge *par excellence* is held to be a direct intuition, a kind of flash, an intellectual illumination; and this immediacy of directness is accounted for according to the metaphysics and theory of knowledge of each philosopher. However these theories may differ, they all agree in one point: they all connect mediation with discursiveness on the one hand, and immediacy or intuitiveness of thought with creation on the other. The *νοῦς ποιητικός* of Aristotle is thus creation combined with direct thought; and the divine or perfect type of knowledge is a kind of divine intuition.

Such theories are consistent with traditional logic and metaphysics, but not with transcendental logic. The former considers reality and the knowing mind as the terms of an absolute dualism. In the conception of the ancients, such terms stood like the steep sides of an unfathomable abyss; and the only normal bridge was the medium of man's very imperfect knowing faculties. Obviously, the power of mediation being so far from adequate, the direct flash and the immediate intuition of reality were exclusive privileges of divinity. Human experience could not provide an adequate bridge to connect the knowing mind and its object; and only through a kind of revelation could man know the essence of such an object, for then he ceased to make use of his usual medium and knew immediately and directly, without the mediation of discursive and rational thought.

With critical and transcendental logic we no longer have such an absolute dualism; since the two terms, the knowing mind and the object it knows, are contained in the same world of experience, where the first is real as far as it is a knowing subject, and the second is real as far as it is both known and unknown, that is, as far as its reality

is immanent and transcendental in respect of the experience of such knowing subject; and every thought is both immediate in its intuition and conceived through the mediation of reason. Hegel, though he is the father of modern dialectic, did not understand this at all clearly, and he is very much worried by the question whether religion is or is not immediate, is or is not intuitive knowledge. At first he is sure that it is; then he observes that religion is not feeling, that the mediation of discursive thought is introduced into it through religious education, and even in revelation itself. He thus gets deeply involved and fails to solve the whole of the problem. This task we must attempt in order to ascertain the value of his contribution; but we may even now state that his difficulty is due to his lack of experience both of the transcendental philosophy of which he is one of the very first pioneers, and of the mystical life, where there is no absolute dualism, because God is in the believer and outside him, and is found as long as he is sought, that is, as long as being found he remains the object of further longing and searching.

## CHAPTER X

### HEGEL MISREPRESENTS KANT

MEDIOCRE Kantians either overlook the distinction between belief and knowledge stressed by Kant, or they lose sight of the consequences of that distinction. When the independent reality of the Noumenon is considered a tenet of Kantian doctrine, the distinction between belief and knowledge is overlooked. For the Noumenon, or in plain language the thing that we know, as it is in itself independently of our knowledge, is by definition what we do not know. It can be, must be, and is a matter of belief, as such unknown and, always as such, unknowable. Now belief will never enable a philosopher as critical as Kant to predicate either existence or reality of what is by definition an unknown term. By definition the thing in itself is unknown and unknowable; we feel, however, that it is a necessary hypothesis, without sharing in the least the view that Kant had to assert its reality in order to build a system of morals. He does not assert it, he could not assert it, without confusing what he has distinguished as carefully as Plato had done twenty centuries before, namely, belief and knowledge. When, on the other hand, his doctrine is understood as rejecting as not real what is beyond my personal experience, it leads to an empirical immanence which is most misleading. What is as yet unknown and what is beyond the circle of my personal experience appears immaterial and irrelevant, even unreal. Then, in respect of religion, theology, creed, and church organization become mere accessories; individual religious experience appears equivalent to religion, the objective nature of which is lost sight of. Belief in the first case is confused with knowledge, whilst in the second case it is emphatically rejected and then reintroduced in a surreptitious manner that deprives it of the character

essential to its functions. The Kantian realist does not appear so harmful to churchmen as the subjective idealist against whom the war against modernism was directed. For us they are both equally dangerous to Christian doctrine. Philosophy will always deal with the object of religion, and it will always harm Christianity unless it is at once both critical and transcendental.

Kantian realists and modernists alike introduce a mythical<sup>1</sup> element into the conception of God. The realistic idea of Him maintained by the former and the experience of Him emphasized by the latter makes Him a spatial and temporal reality. All the theology of realists is characterized by the fact that God was before them, and is outside them, and that God and they are the terms of an absolute dualism. The inevitable consequence is that the flash and illumination from without appear as the only relation possible between them, and belief is understood as knowledge. There is no contradiction in this, because the knower, the real agent, is not man but God, who knows himself and mirrors himself in the human spirit. In the theories of religion entertained by empirical or subjective idealists only one term of the relation between object and subject is considered relevant. Religious experience is the matter of their inquiry, and theology, ritual, and even creed appear first as accessories and then as superfluous. All that is objective matters little or not at all; only the actual experience of a given subject, of a single man, can be of importance. As the second term, though not explicitly discarded, is implicitly overlooked, the first cannot transcend itself, and the subjectivity which follows cannot indeed transcend mere feeling; so that the romantics' endeavour to overcome the abstract atomistic character of discursive thought ends in a sense of the divine which is incapable of any objectivity, and consequently of any universality.

<sup>1</sup> Mythical means here that which contains elements due to the intuitive and imaginative activity of the human mind.

Kant's greatest follower and critic could not take up either of these points of view. Hegel's difficulty was that he did not realize either the difference between his own point of view and that of the romantics, or the identity of their goal. Without noticing that their fundamental purpose is the same, he states his thesis that religion leads us to a universal which embraces all else within itself, and to an absolute by which all else is brought into being, as if all the romantics from Rousseau onwards had said anything else. He goes on to add that this universal and absolute object of worship cannot be a matter of sense-perception or feeling, but of mind and thought,<sup>1</sup> regardless of the fact that Rousseau's *sentiment*, the English or German pietists' religious experience, and Jacobi's instinct are anything but sense-perception.

At first sight it would be easy to understand Hegel on this point and come to the conclusion that in his view truth can only be apprehended in one way, namely, in discursive thought. As a matter of fact, thought is present in every form of apprehension, for him as for Kant. This is the most important common feature of their respective theories and that which gives them their synthetic character. Hegel does not overlook the differences which really distinguish our various modes of apprehension; but he identifies knowledge with thinking. Sense-experience is the first of these various forms of apprehension. It has no intrinsic value, for in it everything depends upon the mind which we bring to bear upon actuality. The second is reflection which defines the experience by relating the conditioned to its condition. The third is that in which the mind proceeds in the pure form of thought, the freest, that is, the least passive of them all. Obviously the degree of truth that we reach is in direct ratio of the degree in which thought is present in our apprehension, and here Hegel appears as the most

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Logic*, Eng. transl., p. 43; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, p. 80.

powerful and faithful follower of Kant, even when he least realizes it.

In their doctrines the first of such forms is immediate or intuitive apprehension. Hegel considers that as such it may appear the finest, noblest, and most appropriate to apprehend the Absolute, with its so-called innocence, its simple trust, its love, fidelity, and natural faith. The two others, reflective or philosophical, must leave that unsought, and therefore unspiritual, harmony behind. He is aware that their methods, and their very attempt to apprehend truth by thought, seem tainted with the pride of man trusting to his own power in the search of knowledge. Viewed in that light, he argues, they may well be regarded as the source of all evil and wickedness, as original sin;<sup>1</sup> but, he goes on, it would be a mistake to regard the natural and immediate harmony as the best state possible. The attractive and fascinating harmony of childhood is a gift of nature; man's goal must be a second harmony reached through labour and the discipline of the spirit. For Hegel the words of Christ, *Except ye become as little children*, are far from meaning that we must remain children.

Further on, when criticizing Kant's attitude towards phenomena, he elucidates the distinction between the subjective idealism of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy and the absolute idealism which was the goal towards which he opened the way trodden since by modern philosophy. He was curiously unconscious of the fact that if he opened the way he did so under Kant's guidance and direction; but he cannot be judged severely on this point, for it is here that he shows so clearly the deepest ground of his personal attitude towards religion, and reveals the intrinsic religious character of his whole speculation. It is quite possible, however, to confine the present inquiry to that part of his criticism which is relevant here.

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., pp. 52-4; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, pp. 91-3.

Kant had taught that the objects of immediate consciousness are phenomena, not independent and self-supporting objects. He had said that the things we know are representations, and that we cannot know their essential nature, which belongs to a world beyond our reach.<sup>1</sup> This is a gross misrepresentation of Kant's doctrine; but Hegel considered it a fair statement, and to it he opposes his own view. Things are mere phenomena, not only for us but altogether; owing to their finiteness they cannot exist in themselves, but purely and simply in the universal. By this he means that single things have no existence or reality outside the divine Idea. His doctrine thus stated strikes one as highly mystical, and it is only fair to add that one must know the whole of his systematic work to realize how little he meant to be a pantheist. Of the religious, mystical nature of his conception he was perfectly aware. He says in fact that Absolute idealism is by no means confined to philosophy; but that it lies at the root of all religion, which teaches that the actual world we see, the sum total of existence, was created by God, and is governed by Him.

In the *Logic* we find no other direct statements about religion; but the whole import of the work goes to determine his conception of it. Indeed we can say, without suggesting that he escaped the inevitable influence of his surroundings, that in its cardinal points his philosophy of religion develops in harmony with the most essential parts of his *Logic*. His theory of the notion and his theory of dialectic could not allow of any other view of religion, and though we cannot here analyse such a technical doctrine of logic, we must state that it compelled him to make the most strenuous efforts to ensure the objectivity of religion. This is especially obvious when he is dealing with what he calls the Notion and the Object. The point of view he there assumes leads him to uphold St. Anselm's

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., 93-4; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, pp. 135-6.

ontological proof against Kant's attack. He does not indeed satisfy the need for objectivity, because his philosophy remains too intellectualistic to enable him to do so; but he emphatically makes the claim which will compel subsequent philosophers to feel that such a need must be satisfied; and he certainly marks out the way towards a living recognition of the Object.

One of the landmarks he has left to modern idealists is found in his treatment of the Idea. He there identifies the bad and the false, the good and the true. Thereby he implicitly condemns the division of theory from practice which, as we have seen, had caused the nature of religion to be misunderstood. Whatever may be his subsequent statements, he there realizes the identity of theoretic and practical values. This is a necessary consequence of his theory of dialectic. Another is that the Idea as the result of the dialectical process is its own result, and as such is no less immediate than mediate, that is, no less intuitive than discursive. He often forgets such consequences of his central doctrine; many instances of his doing so are met with in his polemics on the subject of religion. When he insists on the presence of thought in religious experience, as against the romantic movement, which overstressed the intuitive character of such experience, he loses sight of a Kantian tenet that he himself was to develop admirably, namely, that thought without intuition is empty. Nevertheless, his reaction was healthy and much needed.

The vagueness of the romantics, the indefiniteness of the ideals that they opposed to the analytic outlook common to rationalism and empiricism, last but not least the subjectivity which they had developed in connexion with their one-sided interpretation of Kant, all these called indeed for Hegel's reaction.

'The danger', he writes, 'lies in the looking at what the mind may make out of an object, and not at what that object actually and explicitly is. If we fail to note this distinction, the commonest



perception of men's senses will be religion; for every such perception, and indeed every act of mind, implicitly contains the principle which, when it is purified and developed,' &c.<sup>1</sup>

With this last quotation from the *Logic* enough has been said to make it clear that Hegel was logically bound to assert religion as an eternal form of the life of Mind and to defend the institutions which are the historical embodiment of positive religion. For him the *Natural Religion* of the English Deists, the *Sentiment Religieux* of Rousseau, and the *Religion of Nature* of the romantics, could not be superior religions; they were indeed no religions at all; at best they indicated as against rationalism the religious tendencies implicit everywhere and always in the human mind.

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., p. 135; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. viii, p. 178.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE OBJECTIVITY OF GOD AND ETERNAL TRUTH

A FEELING of sincere reverence and deep devotion runs through Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*,<sup>1</sup> and as one reads the first pages it is impossible not to be impressed by it. Yet constant though it may be, we should not allow it to blind us to his doctrine on the nature of religion. It should rather lead us to recognize that his personal attitude towards such a problem presents real affinities to that of Giordano Bruno. Both are deeply religious, extremely attached to their respective churches, and perfectly sure that creed and revelation are not within the range of human criticism. Both end by conceiving the nature of religion and scientific knowledge, and of religion and philosophy, in such a way that Bruno's theory of double truth leaves religion in a position which in relation to philosophy is at best insecure, while Hegel's view makes it an inferior form of philosophy. That they should have been considered dangerous heretics in every orthodox quarter is therefore not at all surprising. In fact it would be useless to defend Hegel from such criticism; but it is right to call attention to the good wheat which is to be found in plenty mixed with the tares in his philosophy of religion.

The object of religion as well as of philosophy is eternal truth. No one would ever think of denying this explicitly; but Hegel, opposing as he does the extreme individualism of the romantics, who reduced religion to mere personal and ineffable experience, attacks at the same time all the pietists of the eighteenth century. The object of religion as well as of philosophy is, he writes,<sup>2</sup> eternal truth, in its objectivity, God and nothing but God, and the explanation

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Eng. transl., Kegan Paul, London, 1895; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, Stuttgart, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 19; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 37.

of God. No reaction could have been more needed. Man, and the events that occurred in the most intimate recess of his soul, had been considered as the whole reality of religion and philosophy. By denying that we could know anything beyond that, people were degrading the mystical thought of Pascal and the teaching of Kant. By disregarding whatever was outside their personal experience they were cutting away the very ground of the relation of man to God, of subject to object. Hence the indefiniteness of their idea of God, of man's aim and man's duty; and this indefiniteness involved the vagueness of the apprehension of such indefinite reality. This was the evil which Hegel rose to fight, and his efforts have not been in vain, for the study of theology has since begun to flourish once more, and caused some of the Protestant churches to move gradually towards a more universal doctrine. Hegel did not understand that the study of truth in its objectivity entails sooner or later a unity and universality of doctrine; but he taught that the source of particularity, and therefore of plurality, is the undue emphasis laid on our subjective experience. To be truly personal our experience must be both subjective and objective, and it is only through a misuse of the word personal that the experience of the believer, apart from the object of his belief, is considered and called a personal experience. Hegel did not understand this as may be done to-day; but he fully realized that to reduce God to an indefinite something, a mere nebulous idea, was bound to deprive religion of all objectivity and thereby of all truth.

Philosophy for Hegel was not knowledge of the external world or of matter which exists empirically. This, for him, is definitely the concern of science, whereas philosophy must be knowledge of what is eternal, of God, and of that which belongs to His nature. The mind, in so far as it thinks philosophically, immerses itself in this object in the same way as it does in religious experience. Religion and

philosophy come to be one because the latter also is worship.<sup>1</sup> Such is the identity that he establishes between them; but what of the difference owing to which they are usually considered and indeed are actually two? This Hegel does not state so clearly.

Speculative philosophy is the consciousness of the Idea—and we must remember that the *Idea* of Hegel is ultimate reality, namely, God—of the True in thought, and not in sensuous perception or in ordinary thought. According to his dialectical conception of reality the true in thought is something concrete divided within itself—man thinking the object of his thought; but the two sides of what is divided remain opposed characteristics of thought, which the philosopher calls the subject and the object, and the Idea is the unity of these. In plain traditional language, God manifests Himself to man, man thinks of God, and all this happens in God and through God. In sense-perception we have a first apprehension of the object or thing as a whole; in reflection we distinguish different aspects, that is, we analyse without keeping a firm hold of the unity, and it is only in speculative thought that we realize the unity of the different aspects, that is, we come back to synthesis. The triadic movement is thus introduced with Hegel's theory of dialectic, and religion itself is the speculative element in the form as it were of a state of consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Here we meet with what will be for Hegel the essential difference as well as the essential identity between philosophy and religion. Both are essentially thought; but they are different forms of thought. More than this he does not say at this stage, and the nature of the difference is to be conjectured from the statement just quoted, that religion is the speculative element in the form, as it were, of a state of consciousness. The weakness of this view is probably

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., p. 20; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 23; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 41.

due to the fact that he never grasped the Kantian distinction between belief and knowledge. Since he thought that belief was as such subjective, in his endeavour to make religion objective he made it an inferior form of knowledge. For the object is obviously the same for religious belief and philosophical knowledge; but the nature of the relation between man and God and between subject and object is no less obviously different; and that difference is essentially not a matter of degree but of kind. To use Croce's terminology, with its admirable fitness, we may say that belief and knowledge are distinct; though we may never find either of them pure from the other, one of them may and always does prevail, determining thereby the character of man's experience. Thus we shall have religion when belief prevails and philosophy when knowledge is the dominant note in the symphony in which God and man are the alternate themes.

Belief plays in our life a part which presents two aspects that seem at first sight mutually antithetic. It marks the limit of our own selves, and at the same time it marks our tendency to transcend that limit. This Hegel did not see; but by the time he wrote the evils that Vico had foreseen had sprung up and borne their fruit. So Hegel's attack aims at a more definite point. He does not merely conjecture, as the Neapolitan had done a century before, that such evils may arise; he actually sees them. What he attacks is nothing less than the pseudo-scientific point of view which during the eighteenth century had waged war on religion and speculative philosophy, when it did not confuse the latter with science. All this is inevitable as long as the mind does not pass beyond the stage of analytical thought which Hegel calls reflective and considers as the realm of the understanding. All through that so to speak scientific but unphilosophical age the danger was that the theology which is mere interpretation of words, that is, exegesis, would be taken for all the knowledge of which

religion is capable, to the exclusion of metaphysical dogma. Hegel therefore warns us that it is not religion at all; that it is in opposition to the doctrinal system of the church, and liable to ecclesiastical censure. No scientific movement is able to deal with what is really the object of the religious consciousness. On the one hand it conceives the infinite in its own scientific manner, which proceeds by abstraction, and reduces it to finitude, thus making God an abstract infinite; and on the other, however hard it may try to reduce God to a definite something, it finds that all attributes are inadequate to define the infinite. In this way the religious content is annihilated. The finiteness of the knowledge of the understanding suggests something beyond it; but that something is conceived in finite terms as an abstract Supreme being, quite devoid of character and therefore of reality.<sup>1</sup> The philosophy of enlightenment made the idea of God hollow, empty, and poor, not to say unreal, by declaring all predicates in his case to be either inadequate or at best unwarranted anthropomorphism. This movement, more scientific than philosophical, naturally displayed far more of the characteristics of the understanding than of reason; but none the less it was taken for philosophy, which was therefore discredited in the eyes of religious people. It is in his endeavour to clear up this point that Hegel provided the best weapons for use against the scientific and critical forms of Modernism long before even the notion of it appeared. Then once more he turned against enlightenment proper.

Understanding, that is, the analytic, discursive, and scientific mind, hated speculative philosophy. We might add that on the very same ground it hated and opposed religion. As is but too often the case, the hatred springs from a feeling of fear and mistrust. The understanding, according to Hegel, who means, as we have already said,

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., p. 29; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 46-7.

the empirical and rational scientific schools of thought, sees that philosophy proper can throw its light back to the foundation and origin of all investigation, and that at the same time it can reach a content and a knowledge beyond the range of scientific investigation when it inquires into the nature of God. Nothing could be more disquieting to the pseudo-scientific thinker. To be truly scientific his investigations must be confined to a definite field, and that field alone is knowable, for the distinction between the known and the unknown must be sharp and precise and for the time being absolute. We must not overlook the fact that the region of the partly known surrounds the lighted field; but the true scientist does not mistake what belongs to the field of his knowledge for what belongs to the surrounding region of the as yet unknown. This intellectual discipline constitutes the absolute value that science has for mankind. On that steady and clear-cut distinction rests the sanity of modern life and the sanctity of modern science.

Every medal, however, has its reverse, and every quality entails a defect. All that lies beyond the lighted field is an object of suspicion to the scientist. It must be so, as we have seen, in order that we may rely on his conclusions and trust our lives to the men who apply them in our everyday existence and accept them as blindly as the most mystical dogma. The inconvenience which the discipline entails is that knowledge of what is beyond his sphere, and above all of what is beyond the field of what is actually and scientifically knowable, often appears to the man of science as sophisticated and specious trumpery, or at best as unwarranted conjecture. It seems morbid to him, and just as he might encourage a crusade against tuberculosis he is eager to lead one against the hypocritical teachings of priests and the high-flown conclusions of philosophers, whose ambition it is to go deeper and further than the men of science dare hope to go. This negative tendency is the

inseparable defect of the rigorous scientific discipline on which our safety entirely rests. Every claim to knowledge that cannot be submitted to scientific tests goes beyond the field of the understanding, and may seem to the man of science a darkening of the mind. Among men of science Hegel thought he could include those so-called philosophers of the eighteenth century who provoked that romantic reaction which he was witnessing, and who did not observe that precept of Plato which is of such vital importance in intellectual life—that every man should mind his own business. Since the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* it should have been clear to the man of science that if he undertakes any philosophical investigation he must change his method and assume a totally different point of view; and though few may succeed in doing so, it is not impossible that a man trained in both disciplines might make a rich contribution both to his own science and philosophy. As a rule, however, the men against whom Hegel was revolting, just as much as the romantics, had no desire but to continue in 'that nocturnal darkness which they called enlightenment'.<sup>1</sup>

What has been stated in the first two chapters of the present essay was not as clear to Hegel as it is to-day; yet he certainly realized it as far as was possible at the stage reached by historical investigation in his day. The main object of his attack was, however, the theory, very prevalent in his time, which not only identified feeling and immediate experience of the presence of God as characteristic of religion, but went so far as to consider them the only method by which knowledge of such an object can be attained. It was certainly owing to this dispute that he insisted so much on the fact that religion was thought and not feeling, and that it is as much discursive, mediated knowledge as it is intuitive and immediate experience. Actually he goes too far when he asserts that it is always

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., p. 32; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 49-50.



discursive and mediated. To understand his insistence on this point we must realize that, according to his interpretation of his opponents' theory, they held that knowledge of God is certainly not the privilege of reason which seeks to comprehend its object, and for them the consciousness of God was a feeling.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation wrongs the best of the German romantics and misrepresents still more completely the *sentiment* of Pascal and even of Rousseau; but in order to understand Hegel we must accept it for the time being. He argues that what has its roots only in my feeling exists only for me; it is mine, but it has no independent existence of its own. He wonders how any objectivity can be ascribed to it. Hence he proceeds to show first of all that God is not merely an object of feeling, and is not merely my own.

In religion there is inherent a rational element, in virtue of which it involves knowledge and is an activity of comprehension and of thought. Knowing as well as feeling is essential to religion;<sup>2</sup> for in any form of religious experience we meet the activity of man's mind in its purest and therefore most universal form, namely, in the act of thought. Religion in its upward movement towards the True is essentially for Hegel the departure from sensuous, finite objects; and he introduces at this point his theory of the Notion with its dialectic. In his *Logic* (§ 163) he had stated the theory of the Notion, that is, of what for him is ultimate reality. It appears there as a process with three stages—universality, particularity, and individuality. Now, as we follow his analysis of religious experience, we understand that to him religion seemed to be the manifestation of the Notion passing from the moment of particularity to that of individuality, from a state in which it is 'ubgetrübte sich selbst gleich' to that in which it is 'an und für sich bestimmt'. For a hundred pages he goes on developing

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 51; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 54; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 71.

this most fertile thought, and as what is best in his theory of religion is certainly to be found there it must be said that, though he is obviously a heretic and bound to appear such to churchmen, the central theme of his philosophy is a fundamental tenet of the New Testament. If God did not manifest Himself in man, and man did not know the universal which transcends him and which is outside him though he can find it nowhere but in himself, man would not rise above the flesh, that is, he would not rise above the realm of particularity. Man is a person, an individual, because the spirit, the principle of unity and universality, meets in him with the flesh, the principle of particularity.

Hegel is here at his best, though most difficult to interpret if we cease for one instant to illustrate his statements with instances drawn from actual life. If, he goes on, this movement of thought stops short after advancing to what stands to the knowing man as 'other than himself', we have the false progress *ad infinitum*<sup>1</sup> which he ascribes to the knowledge of the understanding. That to him is indeed the realm of sheer particularity and plurality. Thought is for Hegel a progress from what is limited to what is absolutely universal. Moreover, taking his doctrine as a whole, we must see that it is for him the one bridge between the two terms, and this being so he was bound to teach that religion exists only through thought and in thought. God is not for him the purest emotion; He is the purest thought. The opinion that thought is dangerous to religion springs from a profound misunderstanding of the higher spiritual relations. The romantics opposed our moral will to our intellectual activity; they held that the less we think the more perfect is our goodwill. Yet Hegel felt sure that right and morality would not have arisen if man had not thought, and he introduces a distinction to which we owe all that is original in his contribution to ethics and politics.

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., p. 62; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 78.

## CHAPTER XII

### GOD AND MAN'S SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

WITH the exception of Banez and Jansenius, no one since St. Thomas Aquinas had made so great an effort to stress the objective character of truth as Hegel. He draws a distinction between objective and subjective thought—in other words, between God's share and man's in the process of thinking; but he does not seem to have understood how much Kant had achieved in that direction. Like that of too many others, his interpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is so biased as to make the Kantian doctrine purely subjective.

The Universal, he writes, is object; it is thought pure and simple—in other words, it is pure spirit; but it does not develop and determine itself directly in itself. All distinctions exist as yet only potentially, that is, the universal is pure spirit. The opposite of this absolute Universal can only be the individual consciousness. This, Hegel tells us, is the mind of man with its limitations, sins, diseases, and in short wholly empirical character;<sup>1</sup> and *qua* subject it is the second term in its relation with the object. It represents all that is negative, and the object all that is positive. Indeed St. Paul and St. Augustine had said as much in far simpler language. In religion, he goes on however, I am myself the *relation*—the relation between God and man, between the Universal and the individual consciousness; so that I am not purely negative, I am not only the individual consciousness in its purely empirical character; but—let us stress the point—I raise myself above that negativeness, I transcend that purely empirical character *so far as I know God*, so far as I know Truth in its objectivity, so far as I am the relation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Eng. transl., Kegan Paul, London, 1895, p. 63; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Eng. transl., p. 63; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 79–80.

In religion I am the *relation* of the two terms, so that I partake of both. Holy Scripture, Pascal, and all true mystics had said the same; but Hegel's dispute with the romantics made him one-sided. Logically speaking, if I am myself the relation, we must recognize the immediacy of religion, its character of belief, which does not mean mere feeling, but direct experience of God. As a matter of fact, in a moment of rapture he himself states this immediacy, this direct identification of the soul with God, in a manner so subjective that it was likely to bring a frown to every orthodox brow. We may briefly sum up the whole passage:

'I who think, who lift myself up, and the active Universal, the Ego, the immediate subject, are one and the same I. . . . Both sides, that is, the thinking mind and the object of its thought, as well as their relation, exist for me. Both sides seek each other, and both flee from each other. Alternately I accentuate my empirical consciousness in opposition to the infinite consciousness, and accentuate the preponderance of the infinite in opposition to my finiteness. I am this conflict, and it is *in myself* and *for myself* that the conflict takes place, as well as the reconciliation. . . . I am that which holds together the conflicting elements and represents the effort of heart and soul to obtain the mastery over this opposition.'

Nothing could be more romantic than this whole passage. Chateaubriand and Lamartine would have failed to voice this struggle more adequately, and it would have lost in the harmonious lines of Schiller its character of eternal actuality. The struggle is classical as much as romantic; but in these pages of Hegel it is too subjective, and we might say too lyrical, to inspire any classical poet, unless it were Shakespeare. Considered as philosophy it is weak, and lesser men could have done better. If the object is all that is spirit, it is extremely difficult to account for the statement that the conflict is for myself and in myself. I am indeed the relation, and my spiritual realization is indeed in direct ratio to the effort of heart and soul which

I make to overcome the opposition; but the end is beyond myself, and must be. Otherwise the conflict would not arise. Therefore the Self for which it does arise is by no means my own self, flesh and spirit, but the very ground of that opposition. In short, I am the opposition and God is the ground of it.

The relation takes three forms—feeling, sense-perception, and idea or ordinary thought. If we consider the entire process of which these are stages, and their necessary succession, we see with Hegel that up to a point they contain the elevation of finite consciousness to the absolute; and that the relation of the two terms, which constitutes religious experience, may be known as necessary. The forms of feeling, of sense-perception, and of idea or mental representation, as they necessarily proceed one out of the other, pass into a sphere in which their inward and discursive transition from one to the other is necessary. This is the sphere of thought, in which man becomes self-conscious, in which, that is, he ceases merely to have an experience, because he has it *knowing* that he is having it. We have here two mediations, both necessary; one leads to religion while the other takes place within religious consciousness itself.<sup>1</sup> The one makes man aware of God, the second makes him aware of his being aware of God. Obviously this sounds most technical; yet it is no trifling matter that man to be truly religious should be not merely conscious but self-conscious, and Christianity, at least Western Christianity, has laid the utmost stress on the fact.

To the stage of universality, the stage of particularity and differentiation has succeeded. Then there was God and God only; now there is God and man—man conscious that God is all that is positive, and, moreover, conscious that he is so conscious of God's strength and of his own negativity or (more plainly) weakness. The distinction between

<sup>1</sup>Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., pp. 64–5; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 81.

God as Object and the knowing spirit of man as Subject has been made, and it very nearly amounts to an opposition. The subjective side defines itself as what is finite, and the distinction entails an antithesis between the finite and the infinite;<sup>1</sup> but in worship the opposition comes to be annulled, and the annulment is necessary. For at the stage of the self-conscious distinction which we have reached man knows himself as a cipher, and knows his object, the absolute, to be his own substance. This attitude is characterized by fear and is not fully religious. The fully religious experience is, however, on the verge of being reached, because when man as the thinking mind recognizes that the infinite is his own substance the feeling which brings him to make the utmost endeavour to sink himself in that substance is by no means merely negative; it is implicitly positive. Ever since it has been said that to find myself I must lose myself in deed and in truth, this annihilation of the self has always been known as the supreme self-realization. But we must give Hegel his due. No one before him had understood so clearly the part played by self-consciousness in the act by which man is conscious of the Infinite.<sup>2</sup>

Natural theology, according to him, took a one-sided view of worship, for it looked upon God as the object of consciousness only. In spite of the continual use of the words Spirit and Person it never went beyond the idea of Essence. Yet it is not less one-sided to consider religion as something merely subjective, for then worship appears altogether empty.<sup>3</sup> The richer the experience and the more fully determined or specialized it is, the richer must be its object. Indeed the substantial character ascribed to it is the necessary counterpoise to the element of change due to personal opinion and inclination. The object of our

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., p. 65; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 65; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 81-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 67; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 84.

worship must be something permanent in and for itself, that is, independently of our single experiences; and we may add, to complete Hegel's account, that for this reason alone it is an object of belief, and essentially different from any and every object of knowledge. If the spirit of man is to free itself from its limitations, and thus transcend its finitude, the object of its worship must be the Object or, if we prefer to put it so, the negation of time and space. All that belongs to the world of time and space is relative to man, and is therefore essentially contingent and variable, whereas the object of belief, in order to be also the object of worship, must exist absolutely in and for itself. Hegel did not and could not see this as easily as can be seen to-day; but he fully realized that if the spirit of man is to rise above its own finitude and to feel and know itself in God, God must be the One and unique object of worship.

Worship is a relation of identity, a passing from  $s < S$  to  $s = S$ , which, as any relation, requires the reality of both terms; it is obviously annihilated if either of the sides becomes the whole. Above all—and Hegel insists on the point—if the object is lost sight of, the possibility of getting the believer's heart to act on his belief is as much precluded as the possibility of the philosopher's mind reaching objective knowledge. Religion must be a real relation, and contain the distinction involved in consciousness and self-consciousness, so that worship may assume a definite form and become a vital process as the exaltation of the two terms into a higher unity.<sup>1</sup> Worship must be the eternal process by which the subject realizes itself through its efforts to identify itself with its essential ground. Hegel has shown us earlier what he calls the entirely undetermined universality, which we should prefer to term absolute universality, since 'undetermined' is as bad as the 'indefinite' against which he is fighting. Then upon this absolute ground he pointed to the appearance of the

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., pp. 68–9; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 84–5.

element of distinction, which in its spiritual character is consciousness; and this he considers as the beginning of religion, and so repeats Vico. Then again the consciousness developed into self-consciousness; man knowing God became aware of himself knowing God, the stage of judgement and true objectivity is reached, and we have indeed God existing as Spirit for spirit.

We have seen that Hegel's examination of religion in general, and of the religious attitude assumed by man in particular, keeps all through a controversial tone. The reason is that the theology of his time treated of religious experience, of the nature of the relation, *a parte subjecti*, far more than of the nature of the object. Hegel makes due allowance for what is a perfectly good reason for doing so: God should not be considered apart from the thinking mind of the believer; but he insistently criticizes the assumption underlying this tendency: that God is unknown and unknowable. The harm done by such an unjustified hypothesis was not difficult to demonstrate. First, a very 'advanced' form of culture, he writes, not without irony, denies the being of God altogether. This means the denial of religion as the relation of man to God, and consequently those who take that view are bound to think and say that priests are no better than deceivers. At best the necessity of religion is considered due to the fact that it may be an essential means to a desirable end, and should therefore be practised for a utilitarian purpose, namely, to ensure morality. Hegel argues that religion cannot be thus identified with something contingent; but the true view and the false are very close together, and the false is only a slight misrepresentation of the true. It is very interesting to follow Hegel in his discussion of the necessity of the truly religious attitude, which he is very careful to keep free from every trace of utilitarianism and Machiavellianism; yet his treatment of the subject falls short of Vico's.



As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, Hegel could be carried away by enthusiasm, and find himself wallowing in the most subjective romanticism; but we must not take a chance utterance as though it were a fundamental characteristic of his doctrine, which is a constant and conscious effort to assert the objectivity necessary to religious experience. Religion is the result of a process which both distinguishes man from God and relates them to each other; but this result destroys itself as a result, since it is the initial stage of another process by which God and man become one. As we have seen, this means when put into traditional words that the Spirit must have before it the spirit of man, because the Spirit only manifests itself to spirit; and through this manifestation the spirit of man raises itself through knowledge of God until it can come into communion with Him. We must not, however, overlook the fact that it is *owing to this manifestation* that man raises himself to God, otherwise we should misrepresent Hegel. Such a process, he writes, is necessary and objective, not merely subjective, for it is not *we* who set the necessity in movement; on the contrary, it is the act of the object itself. Religion as something spiritual is . . . itself this process and this transition. It is not *we* who establish its foundation.<sup>1</sup> That *we* must obviously mean here our empirical selves in opposition to the transcendental self, the flesh as compared with the spirit.

The whole passage, some five pages long, is difficult to interpret. In his endeavour to oppose the subjectivism of the romantics he is carried away by the controversy into an extreme position which is not in keeping with the rest of his doctrine, very much as St. Augustine was carried away by his controversy with the Pelagians into a view of predestination which was not perfectly in keeping either with his general view of liberty or with the doctrine of the Church.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., *passim*, pp. 102-7; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 115-20.

We have put in evidence the constantly recurring claim of objectivity; but we are bound to say that on the one hand it is far from satisfied in his own works, and on the other it was so powerfully urged that it could not be ignored by subsequent philosophers. Following him once more through his triadic scheme we shall see art appearing as the second form of the life of mind, and in his way of dealing with it and its relations to truth we shall detect better than anywhere else the weakness that underlies his theory of religion in spite of his genius and the truly religious character of his thought.

At first we have intuitive, immediate knowledge of God. Discussion, argument, rational method are no use here.<sup>1</sup> We have this knowledge only in our individual selves and for our individual selves. It is indeed most subjective; in short it is *feeling*. This is altogether without universality, and consequently devoid of objectivity; hence if feeling is equivalent to religion, the religious attitude is unable to take me beyond my empirical self. Yet even if we keep most strictly to this view, if we watch our experience closely, we shall find the dualism arising even in this innermost kernel of subjectivity. Both the determination of eternal truth and my wholly empirical feeling are contained in my religious experience; I am, *qua* subject, their immediate resolution.<sup>2</sup> On account of this internal passage from one to the other, I find myself determined; for even in this immediate feeling I am driven into contrast or opposition, that is, into reflection, and the distinction between subject and object. I must distinguish myself from what I feel.

The second form of religious consciousness is for Hegel *perception*. Art has its origin in the feeling that the Divine, the spiritual Idea, should exist as object for consciousness. If he meant that as soon as man is conscious he feels the

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., p. 119; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 127; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 137.

need of giving sensible form to the events of the inmost recesses of his soul, it would be obviously true. However, that is not his meaning at all; for he writes that the law and object of art is truth as it appears in mind or spirit, that is, spiritual truth, but under such a form that it is at the same time *sensuous* truth existing for perception in its sensible form.<sup>1</sup> Nothing could show more clearly how fallacious are the interpretations of Hegel which ascribe the weaknesses of his philosophy of religion and politics to worldly considerations. His theory of art is just as weak, and for the very same reasons. These will be briefly pointed out as soon as what is relevant in his philosophy of religion has been sufficiently stated to justify the interpretation offered here.

The embodiment of truth as an idea, which is the work of man, must appear outwardly, that is, it must be produced so as to be an object of sense-perception. When the idea appears immediately in nature, e.g. the greenness of the lawn, fitness of action, it shows itself in the midst of variety and confusion, and is neither manifest nor has absolute value. In immediate existence, e.g. in the green of the lawn or the fitness of a cat's action, there is not for Hegel the harmonious relation, which to him is art, and of which he speaks as the relation of truth with the manifestation of the Notion. On the other hand, he considers the work of art is obviously and essentially the product of the Spirit, and its life-giving principle is the Idea; take for instance the green in Flemish landscape paintings or the springing fawns of the sculptor Bugatti.<sup>2</sup>

If we now compare perception with feeling, we see that truth has indeed definitely appeared in its objectivity, which is here, however, determined by the mind that perceives it; for it is obviously objective only in its relation to the perceiving subject, who has reached self-consciousness.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 138; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 139; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 151.

In art the two terms of the religious relation, the object of which the mind is conscious and self-consciousness, are perfectly distinct from each other, and even materially stand face to face. Now the stage in which the totality of the religious relation is realized as a unity must be reached, and this is obviously the sphere of judgement, which Hegel calls general idea or ordinary thought and (with a poetic image) the picture lifted up into the form of universality.<sup>1</sup>

In this, its third form, religion involves an element of strife. The object is not grasped in sensuous perception, nor in a pictorial and immediate or intuitive manner; but mediately and discursively. The religious idea now embodies truth with its objective character, and that is in opposition to feeling and perception. The object has validity in and for itself; it remains what it is in and for itself as against the fluctuation of individual desires and likings. As yet, however, the object of this idea though known under the form of thought is not conceived as thought,<sup>2</sup> for as yet the idea is not the true elevation of the sensuous to the universal; and the hostile attitude of the understanding towards the sensuous is due to the fact that it has not succeeded in freeing itself from that sensuous element. It perpetually oscillates between sense-perception and thought proper. Even when it says 'God is all-wise' or 'God created the world' it keeps the form of contingency and cannot reach the true essence of God. The content of such thoughts has mostly the value of something given; and though incipient reflection, going beyond simple acceptance, may perplex man, experience leads him back to reliance on the given doctrine, because it teaches him that he cannot help himself in such matters by reflection. His return, however, is not due to conviction, since he is

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., pp. 141-2; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 153-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 144; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 155-6.

not driven back by the inward logical necessity which alone would entail that state of mind.<sup>1</sup>

Man, however, does not consist solely of feeling, perception, and a good-natured understanding which can be satisfied with ready-made apologetics. He has other and higher needs. He is the concrete 'Ego', thought determining itself as itself. He exists as the Notion, and it is the Notion which seeks satisfaction. Religious writers had said this before Hegel in much simpler words. Pascal, for instance, in those of his *Pensées* that have been put together as dealing with man and his nature, has said as much, answering there the Jesuit theologians to whom he was so bitterly opposed. The *gratia sufficiens* of Fonseca and Molina, the *human tendencies* of Vico, drawing man to God, Truth, and the Good, the *instinct* of Pascal and Jacobi, and last but not least the *sentiment* of Rousseau and the *a priori* and pure apperception of Kant: all these mean *Deus in nobis*. Hegel, however, as against writers like Rousseau and Jacobi, can boast that for him as for Pascal it is not only *in nobis*, it is in us and outside us. The Notion, as we have said before, in the Hegelian terminology means God, ultimate reality, that which is the object as well as all that is positive in the subject. Here we feel the need of repeating this warning at the close of the chapter, but we feel no less that we must also add a recognition of the great, though surely fully justifiable, liberty which we are taking in interpreting Hegel thus in the light of subsequent philosophy, and of that by which we may usefully interpret him and all modern philosophy, namely, the New Testament.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., *passim*, pp. 148-52; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 159-63.

## CHAPTER XIII

### GOD AND MAN IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

IT is in comparison with the Notion, God, the Spirit, the Pure Act, that the form of ordinary thought appears to Hegel external and deficient in truth. As yet it lacks the *form* of truth; the Object seeks satisfaction, and now the mind also requires the truth *as* truth, that is in the form of truth. What he means here is that hitherto the content of man's religious experience is true because it is itself true; but the form of that experience which is man's share in the process is not adequate to such an object, it lacks the quality that makes it the form of truth. For him the idea of ordinary thought must, so to speak, melt into the form of speculative thought and truth receive this quality of form from philosophic knowledge. This third mediation or passage of the religious attitude into the form of thought appears to Hegel altogether necessary.

At this point it is natural to feel some impatience. Is Hegel then more religious than St. Peter or St. Francis? Obviously such an absurd conclusion would be due to his confusion of belief and knowledge. To incite a man to heroic action or to modify his daily actions religion has no need of philosophy—that is obvious enough; but it is too soon to leave Hegel or to start criticizing him negatively. We must still look to him for help, though this part of his work is extremely difficult to interpret. He is, however, at his best; and as he introduces the mediation of the religious experience through the form of philosophical thought he states his theory of the dialectic of the Idea in a way which makes it much easier to grasp than in the *Logic*. What makes that part of his philosophy of religion so difficult is that he himself clearly had difficulty in thinking it out. Immediacy, direct or intuitive experience, must have been but dimly understood by him. After the

treatment received by such problems from subsequent philosophers it is hard for us to realize his position, though we do meet with the same difficulty when we follow him as he deals with his theory of dialectic. We have there the statement of a longing for a living articulation of truth and thought, and not in the least a systematic conception of it. It is impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy how far his controversial preoccupations led him to this marvellous intuition, for it is no more. He wished to prove that the mediation of thought was present in religious experience because he wished to refute the theories of romanticism and prove that philosophy was not destructive. This double aim often led him into profound contradictions. He admits, for instance, that religion is immediate knowledge, and then brings his own statement to nought by saying later that all knowledge is mediation and therefore every relation requires it. If, however, the wheat is sorted from the tares it is not the contradictions between various statements that must be considered here, but the permanent though fluctuating doctrine that runs through all his thought.

For those who have reached ordinary consciousness truth is identified with a given form of idea; and they naturally believe that if the form is altered it will lose its content. As philosophy transforms ideas, it is naturally enough considered destructive.<sup>1</sup> The fact is that such people have reached only the stage called by Hegel that of the understanding or reflection. At that stage man ascribes absolute validity to the presuppositions of finitude which belong to the understanding, and makes them the rule or standard. The Idea or Notion cannot fit in with such a rule or standard, and is in consequence rejected as *error*. Now every one knows people who might be said to be still at this stage. Whatever is beyond the compass of

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Eng. transl., Kegan Paul, London, 1895, p. 152; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 163-4.

their understanding is doubtful; often they frankly do not believe in it, and say solemnly that it is against reason. We have all met them, and Hegel needs no commentary here; daily life provides plenty of illustrations. Educated and half-educated people often betray themselves as belonging to this stage, and we must not be too ready to pass them by. This activity of the understanding belongs, up to a certain point, to the process which Hegel called the dialectic of the Notion,<sup>1</sup> and the immediacy characteristic of its knowledge is perfectly legitimate as long as the object is known in its simple and direct relation to the person who knows it.

Hegel then asks himself whether religion, the knowledge of God, is an immediate and intuitive knowledge of this kind, or a mediated and discursive knowledge. The former has no mediation and therefore no validity or necessity; and yet under the name of Faith it has been considered as the essence of religion, while the latter was excluded. Hegel is sure of himself here, and therefore writes like the truly great thinker that he is. He fully realizes that such an antithesis is based on two one-sided abstractions. Truth could not be ascribed to either of the two types of knowledge thus opposed, because true thought contains and needs them both. Every deduction, every relation of condition and conditioned, all that we call reflection, is mediated knowledge.<sup>2</sup> The other, Hegel says, ignores all forms of relation: it can say 'God is', and no more, because it is a mere fact of consciousness. We must not be asked if it is true, or why we find it in our consciousness. These questions could not be answered without further knowledge, and would lead to philosophical thought, the very thing against which people wished that religion should be guarded.

He now asks himself whether there is such a thing as

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., p. 158; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 161; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 171-2.



immediate knowledge at all. We should like to answer that there is not, as indeed Hegel himself wished to do, though for a different reason. For us what the romantics called feeling, and Hegel immediate knowledge, is belief, and belief is distinct from knowledge. The train of his argument takes a quite other direction. What is necessary, i.e. that which we think must be, has a cause, and the existence of another term is implied in it. If we see a work of art, we know that there must have been an artist to make it. The thing and its cause are necessarily connected. God, the Notion or Idea, has a higher and intrinsic mediation through itself; for this reason God is called *Causa sui*. For Hegel it is quite obvious that nothing is immediate. Even from a purely empirical point of view we must recognize that no finite things, and not even finite knowledge, are immediate, that is, unconditioned, except in so far as we consider them apart from any relation. This, of course, merely means abstracting them from the context in which alone they can be real, and knowledge of them true. *Being*, or what is immediate, appears essentially untrue—we should add, not false, but incapable of truth—when life, reality, and knowledge are considered as a process, as they must be when seen in the light of Hegel's theory of Dialectic. However simple my knowledge may be, I know something, for to be capable of truth my knowledge must be at least a relation between the I who know and that which I know.<sup>1</sup> Hegel thereupon concludes that religious knowledge is essentially discursive, that is, mediated, because its doctrine is always received or acquired through means which may vary but are always *means*, channels of truth or error. Whatever the religion which a man accepts, he was brought up in it; his knowledge is mediated through doctrine, education, and the like. As to our positive religion, faith is therein essentially mediated, since the doctrine is received by means of revelation.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., p. 164; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, p. 175.

Neither education nor even revelation could supply man with a ready-made religion, and Hegel does not overlook the fact. If spirit alone bears witness to spirit, he thinks that this must mean that the witness requires the peculiar nature of the Spirit, and above all, its spontaneity. Religion is not brought into man from the outside; it comes from within, from his reason and, in short, from his liberty. At first we have not much more than a feeling, and this self-revelation of the Spirit in the spirit of man is as far as possible immediate, and yet like all knowledge it contains mediation. As this incipient religious consciousness develops, man becomes dissatisfied and proceeds to observe and to reflect. The knowledge then reached is external and objective, and appears too cold; it does not carry with it any conviction, it is not of the heart, and it is in the heart and feelings that conviction must exist. The fact is that we behave as if this were our own elevation, whereas it is the Spirit alone which must rise and be elevated. Yet this subjective and human elevation comes to form actually one process with the movement of the object developing its truth in thought as the whole of the thinking process.<sup>1</sup>

The empirical school of psychology is criticized by Hegel under the name of 'Observation'. This movement ends, as far as religion is concerned, with an antithesis between finite and infinite in which I appear as nothing and my God is all, and yet in which I am not annihilated. On the one side I know myself as having no truth or reality because all truth and reality belong to the object; and on the other, I know that I have a valid existence since I can *know* Him. In conclusion, the infinite leaves me my own life; and this may be called the bountifulness of the infinite, as the suppression of the finite might be called its justice. From this point of view God determines himself only as

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., *passim*, pp. 164-74; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 175-85.

the Infinite, as the other than finite, as what is beyond me. In so far as He is, I am not. God is thus essentially the first term of an antithesis which seems absolute. Man, according to that, cannot reach, grasp, or understand God; we have there all that we need, all that we can know; moreover, what is beyond is of 'evil'.<sup>1</sup>

Under the name of Reflection Hegel proceeds to caricature the philosophy of religion current among the Post-Kantian writers. If the caricature lacks humour and wit, it certainly throws into strong relief the feature which is common to pietism—along with the rationalism and empiricism against which it was a reaction—and to romanticism, a subjectivity that recalls Protagoras far more than Kant and his doctrine. Man is the measure of all things—and man does not mean here Man as the concrete embodiment of the Spirit; it means single men in their petty self-centred world, which they cannot even wish to transcend, because they do not suspect that there is something beyond it, and far less that nothing matters except that which is beyond it. Hegel's weakness is due to his misrepresenting Kant.

These theories recognize at first that there is in my finite life a longing for something higher than myself which draws me out and gives me positive value. I am determined as the negative of this Higher which on the other hand is my positive term. This, however, remains the Other; and what is actual and real is my aiming at and succeeding in going beyond myself towards that Other.

Then comes the first reflection. My aiming at, and striving towards, that Other, as well as my emotion and endeavour, all these elements of my religious experience are mine. The predicates I use as characterizing that Other have a significance in me only; to overcome my finiteness

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., *passim*, pp. 174-6; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 185-7.

and to reach the Other would be one and the same thing; but then I should be annihilated. One conclusion only is possible, namely that my interest, which commands me to preserve and maintain my own self, commands me implicitly not to reach the Other. The individuality of the modern mystic, whatever may be the origin of his mysticism, makes it imperative that he should not go too far and lose himself—even in God.

Now, further consideration shows that the self of the believer is the more important term. The seat of this opposition—which Hegel calls a twofold negativity—of myself as finite and God as Infinite is in my own consciousness. Hence a kind of satisfaction: 'I am'; the sense of longing, the endeavour to better my condition, the feeling of obligation, all springing within me point to a conclusion which is a further self-satisfaction: 'I am . . . immediately good'. Sin is something contingent and external; and the effort to remove from myself such a contingent cause of alteration in my Ego is a mediation, we might say more simply, a way through which *I* bring my nature back to itself. Tradition would have it that it was God who reconciled the world with Himself; but according to modern theories, this reconciliation takes place in myself as finite. To this goodness of the original state nothing further could be added than the knowledge of it, that is, the belief in one's own goodness, and Hegel thought that this was added by Kant.<sup>1</sup>

Hegel thinks that he is justified in summing up in this way all the opinions of what were to him recent times, and he says in so many words that the extreme subjectivism characteristic of all the theories he is criticizing is a consequence of Kant's philosophy. We know perfectly well that he is not purposely misrepresenting Kant's doctrine; but it is to modern readers so obvious a misrepresentation

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *op. cit.*, Eng. transl., *passim*, pp. 177–80; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 188–91.

that though they may feel certain of Hegel's sincerity, it would be difficult to prove it. During the last hundred years, however, many professed Kantians have upheld the views against which these criticisms were directed. We have seen, for instance, the development of a theory of immanence which, far from being transcendental, insists exclusively on the fact that God is *in us*, and overlooks the consequence that if he is only in us, he is not the Infinite, and cannot regulate our actions or even move us to act at all, since this requires that he should be both in us and outside us. The immanence postulated by Kant was meant to be transcendental; and even if his treatment of the regulative Ideals does not give us all that might be expected, at any rate it proves beyond question that the matter of any single experience is in itself devoid of any absolute value. Because Kant's treatment of the point falls short of his intention, many people have overlooked the fact that *Deus est in nobis* as far as and no further as we transcend ourselves and, having found Him, seek Him still beyond what we have; and Hegel wishes to emphasize the danger of just this half-way immanence that looks within and is satisfied with that which is there.

Finiteness appears in three forms, in sensuous existence, in reflection, and in the mode in which it exists in Spirit and for Spirit. Even in the first form, the finite term, namely Man, is annihilated, because every impulse relates him as a subject to another term, something which as 'other' limits him and makes him feel that he is finite, and that he can only satisfy himself by going beyond himself. In transcending his own finite character, man annuls that together with the relation. Yet he remains finite, since the desire once satisfied revives and becomes again a sense of need and deficiency. Satisfaction seems equivalent to infinity, since it is for ever recurrent; but it seems so owing to its purely formal nature. From what Hegel calls the point of view of reflection of understanding man can only

know an 'allness' which he mistakes for a universal; and the antithesis cannot be overcome either in knowledge, in ideal, or in practical life. The Infinite which is a total, an allness, to keep Hegel's word, is just as finite as man, and is moreover thought by him. It seems in this way that man produces the something beyond him as the infinite, just as much as he determines himself by means of it as finite. Man indeed stands above this determination, and is again the positive term; and through his reflection he overcomes the dissolving antithesis, so that though he may pretend to humility, he is swollen beyond measure with vain and empty pride. It is indeed very difficult to follow the thought of a man in this state of mind, and Hegel considers that the difficulty arises because in this extreme subjectivity or individualism the object, the other, in religious experience, God, is lacking, and the subjective mind considers its own self as absolute.<sup>1</sup>

From this point of view, which Hegel calls Kantian and post-Kantian, man's experience is devoid of content, and religion is impossible. Man is the positive term, whereas the Idea which is absolute must be, in itself and not only in and through me, the positive term. To reach the only religious attitude in which man can be rational and objective in the consideration of his own finite nature, it is necessary that he should renounce his individuality in deed and in truth. (It is not very clear at this point whether by individuality Hegel means here exclusively the empirical element in man, or his whole self; but in the light of the whole doctrine the former seems the more likely.) If something truly objective is to be apprehended, if any truth is to be reached in knowledge, it is necessary that I, the knowing subject, should act as that which is universal in myself. Now this is the nature of reason in the act of thinking, and *religion itself is this action, and is*

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, op. cit., Eng. transl., *passim*, pp. 180-92; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 191-203.

*characteristic of the man who thinks rationally, who being an individual annuls himself as such, in order to find his true self in the Universal.* Philosophy also is rational thinking; but whilst as religion it is action, as philosophy it is thought. Religion is, so to speak, *reason thinking naïvely*; and as such it stays in the sphere of ordinary thought.<sup>1</sup>

When Hegel wrote the passages which are here printed in italics he must have realized that theory and practice meet in religion; and faith must have meant to him, if only for a fleeting instant, what it is in reality, thought and action meeting on the ground of belief. If he had kept hold of this intuition, it would have saved him from the mistake of seeing in religion a naïve form of philosophical thinking: but the whole of his central conception of the life of mind drew him into making religion an inferior form of philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Eng. transl., *passim*, pp. 192-5; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 203-5.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ART AND RELIGION IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

PEOPLE have wondered whether or not Hegel believed that religion is bound to lose itself in philosophy, whether he really thought that it was an inferior form of philosophy. It may be said at once that two different views run all through his theories on the subject. One is due to experience, and is, so to speak, his personal conviction, and according to it he knew that art and religion are essential forms of the human spirit. The other is determined by the central conception of his whole system, joining with, or rather determined by his controversial attitude towards rationalism, empiricism, pietism, and romanticism; and the well-known collapse of his theories of art and religion is due to this. Instead of allowing for these two forms of spiritual life, he turns his back upon them altogether, for he either merges them in philosophy, where they lose their character of art and religion, or he makes them act as its handmaids.

Again, people have criticized his method, and objected to the application of the *a priori* dialectic of the pure Notion to this branch of philosophy; for according to Pfeiderer<sup>1</sup> such application ought to be supplemented by a careful examination of the matter of experience. These criticisms certainly point to a real weakness; but they miss the point nevertheless. Philosophers should not devise a theory of religion, education or politics deducing it from a systematic conception of life as a whole, and then turn round to examine experience and see if it fits in with the theory. It is experience that must first state the problem, and the philosopher will then find in the statement itself all the elements of his future theory; for they will be given

<sup>1</sup> Otto Pfeiderer, *The Philosophy of Religion*, Eng. transl., William and Norgate, London, 1887, *passim* pp. 114, 115.



by the difficulties of daily life. He can either arrange these data in the light of a central system, or from consideration of them come to the conception of a central system. In either case he must come back with his theory to experience and to history, and test there in the daily life from which his data were taken the construction he has built upon them. For this and no other reason do Vico's views of art and religion stand the test of time better than Hegel's, though they are older by a century, and in many respects weaker. The German makes the greater use of the word concrete; but it is the Neapolitan whose thought is concrete, because his polemics never carry him away from experience, that is, history, the realm of man's actual deeds whether of to-day, yesterday, or to-morrow. There theory and practice blend in such a way that the latter states the problem and the former faces it and, modified by it, modifies it in its turn in practical life. The injustices of practical life compel us to ask ourselves what justice is and subsequently to modify the relations between man and man until they more or less correspond with the new idea. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries philosophy flourished best away from the schools. The writings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, like those of Galileo, have exclusively practical aims, and they state the problems on which philosophy has been engaged ever since. Louis XI, Commines, Machiavelli, Henry VIII, Cromwell, and many others set, in deed or in words, problems which philosophy was handling all through the two following centuries. The result was the French Revolution and the similar movements that introduced into practical life the conclusions to which philosophy had been led.

Hegel, however, did not see this, and did not understand his own conception of the dialectic in its concrete reality which is life. Otherwise he could not have written that philosophy is a twilight bird. The place that he himself occupies after Kant and Leibniz in the history of

German civilization may be used here to refute his conception of philosophy as a final stage. His transcendental is a deity of wood or stone, far more transcendent than transcendently immanent. It is akin to the Imperialism and Marxism that have since flourished in German practical life, and if it is not their common source, it is at any rate their common feature. The individual mistaken for the purely empirical and overwhelmed by the purely transcendental was bound in more materialistic minds to become the citizen overwhelmed by the State; for the State-worship common to both was a form of worship in which individual liberty was the obvious sacrificial victim. Since Benedetto Croce has so clearly established the difference between distinction and opposition of terms, it is not hard to realize that in Hegel's philosophy of religion his own theory of the Dialectic is wrongly applied.<sup>1</sup> Opposition is between positive and negative. We have, for instance, a genuine opposition between known and unknown, good and bad, being and not being, light and dark; and it is perhaps owing to a long familiarity with Croce's thought that the terms 'positive' and 'negative' have all along been naturally introduced here, whenever a truly dialectical relation was the ground of the argument. Croce's contribution to the theory is so true to the laws of thought that often people who have not yet made up their minds about its soundness are already applying it. In religious experience itself there is a dialectical relation with a twofold aspect. There is Truth, God, the Spirit, pure act and perfect knowledge, the good *par excellence*, all that is positive, and then there is man in all his negativity. Again, there is man as he ought to be to enter into perfect communion with God, and as he is and must be to become conscious of his own negativity. There is no more typically dialectical process than the religious

<sup>1</sup> Croce, *Saggio sullo Hegel ed altri scritti*, chaps. i, ii, iii, iv, Laterza, Bari, 1913.

life with its continual transcending of the negative, sin, ignorance, lack of power, and its striving towards the positive, virtue, knowledge, force. On the other hand, no dialectic relation can be detected between religion and philosophy or between art and philosophy. They are distinct forms of the life of the spirit; but they are not opposite terms such as being and not being. Hegel's dialectical and therefore triadic formulae mislead him more than once. The nature of his speculation determines this form, which in its turn often influences the development of his theories, as in the only too obvious case of the theory of religion; but this influence is no less obvious in his philosophy of art; in fact it determines his conceptions of both art and religion, and in both cases it leads him into the same error.

Reality is for Hegel Mind. The terms he generally uses to describe this ultimate reality, which is in plain language God, are the Notion, the Idea, and Thought. It seems to be a fact that each person, or more exactly each social and religious group, generally thinks of God under one of His traditional attributes. The God of England, that is, of some of the churches flourishing in England, is pre-eminently the Almighty; the God of France is *Le Bon Dieu*, and there the idea of goodness is so closely interwoven with the idea of God that the theory of predestination has never met with any degree of popularity. The Jansenists thought above all of eternal Truth when they spoke of God, and this entailed their whole idea of eternal justice. We could multiply cases *ad infinitum*. With Hegel God is Truth as Thought, and in consequence, since the supreme value is Thought, everything is of value *as far as it is thought in its highest form, namely, philosophy*. Art and religion are in the life of the spirit essential values; therefore somehow, in part, or up to a certain point, they must be thought in its highest form.

Again reality, that is, Mind, is for Hegel the process through which the dialectic, and through it again the

Notion, articulates and realizes itself. Therefore the whole of life belongs to this process; and this no one can gainsay. He makes a peculiar use of another word which lends itself to an ambiguous interpretation, and is himself the first victim. Religion, art, and philosophy are *moments* of the mind, or in the life of the mind. At first the word is probably used in its scientific sense of force or factor, i.e. *Momentum*; and in that case the three moments, factors, or forces may be simultaneous and eternal. When, however, this meaning of the word shifts into the temporal sense in which it is used in ordinary language, then the three moments form a succession and become historical stages. Now, that this happened to Hegel's use of the word is beyond question, since he even went so far as to lay down the order of their succession.

Speculative thought is an exhausting occupation, and all thinkers offer us even in their best works examples of such a collapse from speculative into ordinary thought. A superhuman intellect was needed to understand philosophically the dialectic conception of life not only as passing between opposite terms such as being and not being, but as composed at the same time of distinct and yet simultaneous dialectical processes all belonging as essential factors to that complex process which is eternal because it is for ever becoming. Hegel's contribution cannot be overrated; but the contributions of other men were needed to make up the deficiencies and repair the errors that mar his personal achievement. He takes religion out of the sphere of practice and feeling and places it as high as possible, on the highest peak of the spiritual world, which is for him speculative thought. When, however, he has thus placed it in the privileged seat of philosophy, a question at once arises as to their relation to each other. Both, we are told, are essentially forms of thought; but what then is the nature of the difference which makes them two? Hegel could give no satisfactory answer, and

the one he gave could only provoke hostility and repugnance in every orthodox religious quarter: religion is for him a naïve form of philosophy.

The substitution of speculative thought for all the other forms of spiritual life, which are thus condemned to grow up to a logical level and perish, blinded this great thinker to a very important fact, namely, that art and religion must be independent, autonomous forms of such a life in order to fulfil their respective purposes. His panlogism was complete, and he judged both art and religion by logical standards. Any logical relation entails a definite dualism of subject and object, and for this reason he wearies the reader with these ever-recurring terms. Croce has solved the problem in respect of art. It is this dualism, due to his panlogism, that has prevented Hegel from seeing the true nature of the immediacy which characterizes artistic intuition. It is our conviction that for the same and no other reason he failed to understand the immediacy which is the distinctive feature of religion.

Art was for him the first and lowest of the three forms of the spirit. Religion took the second place, and philosophy the third. Not that artistic experience was ever explicitly declared subservient to speculative thought: on the contrary, its independence was repeatedly proclaimed; but its relation to knowledge was misrepresented, and as its cognitive character was over-stated, the work of art, which was called by Hegel the '*concrete concept*', appeared of necessity an inferior form of the Idea. Religion was identified with knowledge, and certainly knowledge is an essential element in it; but it is not purely and simply knowledge. The peculiar way in which Kant came by his conception of religion is more enlightening than that conception itself.<sup>1</sup> Together with the belief in the supremacy of Practical Reason and the theory of the categorical

<sup>1</sup> See C. J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, Clarendon Press, 1926, chaps. iii and iv, and specially p. 71.

imperative, it stresses a character of religious experience that forbids our making religion knowledge pure and simple. Hegel, however, was not at best very familiar with this side of the Kantian doctrine, or he could not have held it responsible for all the subjectivism against which he was rebelling, which was due, not to Kant, but to a one-sided misrepresentation of his theories. Yet there is one passage which we have seen above, in which Hegel does seem to suspect the true nature of religion and to grasp its distinctive feature. He is speaking of morality, and comes to the conclusion that if something objective is to be really recognized, if some truth is to be found in knowledge, I as the knowing subject should act as that which is universal in me, and should maintain and reckon myself only as that universal. He then introduces a real distinction: the *action* in which religion consists and through which I renounce in deed and in truth my individuality (we should prefer 'that in me which is empirical or of the flesh'; because, bluntly speaking, if my individuality disappeared so should I) appears in philosophy in the form of *thought*.<sup>1</sup> Religion is here both theory and practice. Unfortunately Hegel could not hold to this view, though it is the one clue that can enable modern philosophy to find the relation between religion and morality, science and philosophy. Had he been able to keep and develop this intuition of religion as the form of experience in which thought and action are undifferentiated, he would not have come to the conclusion that this form of spiritual life is mediate, that is, discursive knowledge. He could at worst have made it together with art a function of the mind as necessary as philosophy to the apprehension of the Absolute. They would even then have been inferior forms, but necessary and not to be outgrown. As it is, the value he gives them is historical: in his theory they are necessary stages in the development of mankind, and those who hold that his

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 110, 111.

philosophy is definitely anti-religious and anti-historical can find a good deal of evidence to support their case.

Without taking as seriously, as Benedetto Croce does,<sup>1</sup> the statements in which Hegel seems to pronounce the funeral oration of both when he sinks religion in philosophy and makes art subservient to it, we must agree with him unreservedly on one point and extend to religion what he says there of art. Such Hegelian views are fatal to the understanding of the nature of artistic and religious experience. We must go even farther. It is not only the autonomy and lasting value of art and religion that cannot be grasped in the light of this dialectical misrepresentation; philosophy is in no better case. For if two out of the three forms of the mind are historical stages which must inevitably be outgrown, it is natural to ask what is to happen to the third.<sup>2</sup> It is reduced to a stage no less than the other two, and can only boast of the privilege of burying them first, or rather of being their grave, before it perishes itself for lack of that character of being part of a process which is the *sine qua non* of dialectical life.

Hegel's dialectic is, as we have seen, at best the weak conception and weaker elaboration of an intuition so great as to ensure for him one of the highest seats in the philosophical Olympus. His view of mediation is no less weak, and his conception of immediacy is in consequence very poor indeed. All knowledge is to him discursive; all relation is mediation, that is, triadic, consisting of object, subject, and their relation. Modern theologians, he maintains, go against revealed religion and rational thinking when they say that immediate knowledge is the only possible knowledge of God. Their assertion is based on two one-sided abstractions, the mediation of discursive knowledge and the immediacy of intuitive knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Croce, *Estetica*, quarta edizione, Laterza, Bari, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank here Prof. H. H. Joachim of Oxford, who pointed out to me this logical implication of my own criticism.

No one could dispute this statement, and if it were the final conclusion all would be well; but as he goes on he seems to lose sight of this starting-point.

Let us consider the following statements:

(a) Obviously from an empirical or external point of view nothing is immediate; it only appears so when we put out of sight its relation to us.

(b) Knowledge, however pure and simple it may be, is always a relation.

(c) Religious knowledge is always mediated, since even in non-revealed religions man receives it through education and tradition.

Here we obviously have three very different conceptions of mediation. In (a) it means the relation of the knowing mind to that which it knows. In (b) it means that what is known is always known in relation to something else. In (c) it means that the mind never comes to any knowledge except through some connecting channel. Only in (a) does Hegel mean a relation which has any affinity with what is meant by logical mediation; (b) and (c) have nothing to do with it. We do not mean to suggest that Hegel did not know what logical mediation really is; it is the nature of immediacy that he had not understood. His attitude towards this problem is exactly like that of the critics who object to the theory of art which accounts for the nature of any and every artistic experience by saying that it is always an immediate intuition-expression. They object that any intuition must be the intuition of something, and that expression must be the expression of something, and the work of art the relation of form to subject-matter. Like them, Hegel fails to see that the historical antecedents, including previous intellectual, moral, technical, artistic, or religious experience, must have become part of the artist's mind when he lives his artistic experience. The value of this, however, obviously depends on the natural and acquired capacity with which



the artist creates or enjoys in perfect autonomy. Just as moral or sentimental life has value so far as it is free, so artistic or religious experience is truly artistic or religious in the measure in which it is free. The liberty thus required is not the absence of external compulsion, but the absence of the inner logical necessity which is irresistible so long as the dualism inherent in knowledge remains. So long as this dualism remains between the thing to be expressed and the expression of it, or between the object of worship and the worshipper, there is no spontaneity or immediacy, that is, no pure art or pure religion.

Creative imagination and religious consciousness are autonomous in the sense that the one is not at the service of truth, does not exist just to embody it, nor the other at the service of morals, to enforce them, or at that of philosophy, to prepare men to receive it. They are autonomous because they are an end in themselves and eternally necessary to the life of mind. Perhaps it may seem strange to some that they should have their own end in themselves and yet be necessary to the whole of our spiritual life, and the rest of our spiritual life to each of them. We shall not try to explain the fact here and now; but simply state that owing to their immediacy they are necessary elements in every mediation, and also that as they are never pure of mediation, it is also necessary to them. This sounds very like the Kantian tenet that intuitions without concepts are blind and concepts without intuitions are empty. It differs from it in that for us the concepts are rich in elements that we should call intuitional, though they are not intuitions, and the intuitions contain of necessity conceptual elements which, however, are no longer concepts.

As to our particular problem, the conclusion is that the religious element necessary to the life of the mind is an attitude, and that it prevails only in religion, of which it is therefore the essential characteristic. There is, however, as great a difference in reality and value, between real actual

worship on the one hand, and on the other the religious attitude that underlies every spiritual act and from which spring all objectivity in knowledge and all sense of law in practice, as there is between the value and reality of a work of art, and the ordinary intuition which accompanies the slightest act of our mind. Hegel himself was perfectly aware of the difference between implicit and explicit religion, and we shall not do violence to his doctrine if we conclude by saying that the difference in actual reality is the same as that between concrete patriotism with its accompanying rights and duties, and the sentimental humanitarian love of mankind that seems to have been invented to rid the possessor of all definite civic and social duties, including the simplest family bonds.

## CHAPTER XV

### FROM HEGEL TO GENTILE

WE pass now from Hegel to Gentile, and as we do so, it will be well for us to consider as briefly as possible the conception of religion that occupies some hundred and fifty pages of the former's work.<sup>1</sup> This will make it easier to discern accurately the points in which the latter's view differs from or resembles his. Nowhere do we find this last exponent of German Idealism more perfectly conscious of the nature of thought as a living process. This passage, and especially that in which he deals with the mediation of religious consciousness in itself, forms the very best illustration of what he means by Thought. Nor could we find anywhere more patent the confusion in his thinking between religion and philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Obviously he clings to the autonomy of art and religion when he is bent on rescuing them from the then prevailing tendency to merge them in feeling, while he simply forgets this autonomy when he comes to the other extreme and sinks them himself in speculative thought. Lastly, it is obvious that for him the true, the ideal religion is *religious philosophy*.

Intending to trace the development of the religious consciousness he sketches there the history of ancient philosophy. Man contemplates the world and because he is a thinking, rational being, he finds no satisfaction in the chance nature of things. He measures the finite and longs for the absolute; he sees the contingent and longs for a self-sufficient necessity, as the basis of all that is contingent. The problems of the Eleatic school and of all pre-Socratic philosophy are introduced as belonging to the first stage of religious consciousness. The next is characterized by the

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Eng. transl., Kegan Paul, London, 1895, pp. 89-258; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 103-268.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Eng. transl., pp. 160-204; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xv, pp. 172-214.

desire to find a suprasensible ground for the visible harmony of our world of sense, and Aristotle's theory of an unmoved mover is instanced. Similar examples might be given *ad infinitum*; but these are sufficient to demonstrate that for Hegel the best form of religion and the only true one is religious philosophy.

The criticism of this view is not, however, as simple as one might wish. It is necessary to grant that the best philosophy is religious; there is no doubt about this; but once it is granted, it must be laid down at once that, deeply religious as it may be, it is not religion. However pervaded it may be by the deepest religious sense, it remains philosophy, for the very same reason that however well written a work on mathematics may be it will never become a work of art. The works of Plato and Spinoza are very good instances of both. Nothing can be more poetical than the works of Plato, nothing more aesthetic than the whole edifice of Spinoza's *Ethics*; nothing, again, more mystically religious than the thought of both. Nevertheless it is impossible to classify them as works of art or as documents of religious experience, because their essential feature is their philosophical character, and those who cannot grasp this fail to recognize the aesthetic and religious value that animates and enriches them. If the fact needs illustration, we may mention that in the Vittorio Emmanuele library at Rome there sat daily, for several months, a priest some fifty years of age. He was working very hard on Plato and St. Augustine; but it was evident that his work was absolutely unrewarded. His fatigue and distress were obvious. You would have thought that he not only lacked philosophical training, but lacked as completely all sense of art and religion. Plato and St. Augustine wearied him to such an extent that it seemed as if he must have no sense of harmony whatever and no sense of the divine. Yet he was a celebrated composer of sacred music, known to the public at large for his genius, rich in

harmony, and to his friends for the piety of his life. What he lacked was purely and simply philosophy. Neither Plato's nor St. Augustine's works can be enjoyed by a man who lacks it. They cannot be reduced to either art or religion, because they are philosophy and can only be understood as such.

Gentile is usually classed as a Hegelian, perhaps because he is one of the best interpreters of Hegel. It would, however, be more accurate to describe him at first simply as an idealist, for in his intellectual pedigree Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Vico, and Kant occupy places no less important than that of Hegel. Sometimes he is considered to be a disciple and follower of Benedetto Croce; but these terms do not describe accurately the relation between Croce and Gentile. Whatever the exact nature of that relation is, however, it is certain that nothing in the work of either can be considered quite independently of the work of the other; for they complete each other in a way that is almost unique. Croce is but nine years the elder, and appears to be Gentile's senior, only because his rise to prominence was more rapid. On the philosophical horizon, they are as it were twin stars. Gentile's personal inclinations and gifts draw him towards problems less attractive to the general public than those of art, and indeed Croce's other works, though in every way worthy of his fame, have contributed to it far less than those on aesthetics. Gentile's problems, moreover, required the greatest maturity of mind, and so the dates of the publication of his systematic works are still recent. Dealing directly as they do with the nature of Mind, they embody, and must embody, with his personal and direct experience, the whole output of Western thought. Not only idealism, but materialism, rationalism, and empiricism had to be familiar to him before he could give a speculative account of his experience of the life and nature of Mind. By the time he did so he had been for ten years

the intimate friend and collaborator of Croce, so that the reader is sometimes struck by the Crocian tone of this or that chapter in his work, while in two cases whole books of Croce will sound strangely Gentilian.

Both began to write when still very young, and the bulk of their production is amazing. It would be a great mistake to judge Croce on his *Estetica* or Gentile on his *Pure Act*; and it would be a peculiarly dangerous error here to start from the latter's philosophy of education or from his reform of the Hegelian dialectic. His activity as a critic and an historian, and above all his personal experience as a teacher of philosophy, must be taken into consideration, for it certainly enabled him to start directly from daily life and experience, even when dealing with the most speculative subjects.

In his first published work, an essay on the philosophy of Marx, he shows himself already a mature thinker. Although he is not yet 23 years old, he is no more overawed by the colossal edifice of Hegel's system than he is by the scientific trappings of Marx's theories, or by the clamorous success of historical materialism as a whole. He sees the fact in Hegel's idea as clearly as he sees the idea in what Marx and his followers are pleased to call the economic fact. Religion is not the subject of the essay; but already he fully realizes the part it plays in life.<sup>1</sup> He emphasizes its importance as one of the things that cannot be derived from economic facts, because it requires the liberty of the spirit, a liberty which is equally impossible when the activity of men is considered as determined by physiological or by economic facts. Though his tone is extremely Hegelian throughout the essay, he shows that he has been to school with Vico, and is already himself when he touches the subject of religion. He has seen already that the philosophy of practical life must not be hastily dealt with as merely a necessary appendix to any important theory of knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *La Filosofia di Marx*, Spaerri, Pisa, 1899, pp. 8-42.

This leads to a second essay on Marx, the object of which was to determine the place that Marxism occupies in the history of speculative thought; but its title, *La Filosofia della Pratica*, shows the turn that his interests were taking. Marx, as is well known, meant to be a materialist, but he could not rest satisfied with the conception of life that he found in German materialism such as that of Feuerbach. He was in consequence a realist, and his work fully justifies his success. He softened materialism by the introduction into it of a considerable amount of Hegelian idealism; but in spite of such borrowing he remained a materialist. The reason for this is that reality was to him a subjective production of man's senses. This meant perfect relativity, and nowhere is this more obvious than in his conception of religion.

Feuerbach's views, against which Marx was revolting, may be summed up as follows. In religion man does not strive to know himself in God, in the Universal. The one aim of the individual man is to satisfy his bodily needs. Matter does not reach truth in mind, it is mind that reaches truth in matter.<sup>1</sup> The whole of history appeared as determined by the needs of the human body, expressed in all human affairs whether individual or social. All this was perfectly consistent except for one fact; the logical basis of this conception was that reality was the content of sense-knowledge, and was therefore given. Since it was matter, it obviously could not be the subjective product of man's sense.

It was just at that point that Marx attacked the theory; and Hegel provided the weapon. If the content of sense-perception is the only truth and reality, and is given to the subject, not produced by him, religious feeling cannot be, as Feuerbach maintained, a social product; it too must be given. Marx's own view is fairly simple, too simple in fact. Observation of facts, he says, shows that social life is

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-7.

above all practical, and that all the mysteries usually accounted for by mystical explanations can find a rational explanation in what he calls *Human Praxis*, and in the intelligence of it. He opposes materialistic intuitionism because it is bound to be analytic and as such must lead to what he terms *Bourgeois Society*. His own *Praxis*, or practical life, is dialectical; as it acts it determines itself as an object. This theory may easily be illustrated: eleven boys wish to constitute a cricket team, and the new-made team confronts them and limits their liberty as cricket players. Then it resolves itself into a synthesis of being and not-being—the team plays a match, and each member finds in the team his opportunity of playing, and is a good player in so far as he makes one with the whole team. In the matter of religion, Marx's theory is a real advance on that of Feuerbach. Human family life is the *praxis* of which the Holy Family is a projection, *Selbstentfremdung*. With the advent of criticism this myth is recognized for what it is. It is therefore brought back to the human family as its ideal. A man, a woman, and children make a human family; like all that is of real value for man, family ties are considered as an ideal value.<sup>1</sup> Mind therefore lifts them out of the world of change, making them pass from subjective to objective reality; but as soon as it has set them up in a transcendent and mythical position, it must merge again into its own daily life the objective reality which it has conferred upon them.

This, Marx's own theory, is often ascribed to Gentile himself as an inheritance from Hegel. Obviously those who make such statements show a complete ignorance of the theories of the two idealists, and a very slight acquaintance with those of Marx. In fact Gentile, hardly then out of his teens, wrote and worked zealously to refute this theory. As a true idealist he could not rest satisfied with

<sup>1</sup> See Gentile's Preface to the last edition of *Bertrando Spaventa* Valecchi, Florence, 1920, pp. 55-77.



the relativity inherent in it. Though he had as yet no personal conception of the nature of religion, he knew that the account given of religion was not adequate, and his reason for rejecting it is typical of Italian Idealism, which in Croce, and above all in himself, appears definitely as what we should term *Historical Idealism*. Marx's account of religion misses altogether the nature of the part it has played in history. Gentile looks directly at life, and the test shows that the theory does not work in actual experience; we must conclude that in spite of all appearances it has no root there. Although still a student and a professed follower of Hegel, he is already much nearer to Vico, and ready to join Croce in the stand which they made for ten years against all forms of abstraction and therefore of sectarianism. Even here in these early essays the relating of theory to practice gives that concrete view of life which enabled Croce to see art and Gentile to see religion as they really are, autonomous and eternal. It should not, however, be supposed that Gentile has done for religion what Croce has done for art. So far he has not even made the attempt, and perhaps could not make it successfully; for if his thought is more systematic, he lacks not only experience of religion, but many of those gifts of insight into it which Croce has into art. He has prepared the ground and the tools for later thinkers to use. The nature of belief in its relation to knowledge and practice will require much study before the material provided in such abundance by writers like Otto and Von Hügel can be worked up into a satisfying account of the nature of religion.

It has been said above that Marx's theory of religion was opposed by Gentile as (a) relativistic, and (b) not true to life and experience as they appear in history. We know the ground on which he raised these objections, for no philosopher has ever been more careful to set forth the evidence which led him to take the view which he holds of

any given problem.<sup>1</sup> Bertrando Spaventa had written some forty years before an excellent essay on the relation of the universal to the particular. In it Hegel's theory of the dialectic of the Notion was completely transformed; but Spaventa's essay is too abstract, and does not show that concrete character which is so satisfying in the work of Croce and Gentile. It is not well written—personally we should say that it was both obscure and morbid (the author was in exile when he wrote it); but it sank deep into the mind of the young and vigorous Gentile, then working under the sun of his native Magna Graecia, in the full tide of good fortune and brilliant promise; and eventually it pervaded his whole thought. No relativity would satisfy him, and with his pupils before him he watched the universal contending with the empirical in every individual mind and in every single human act.

As to the part played by religion in history, that is, in life and actual experience, he knew it too well to accept Marx's theory. Side by side with the speculative influence of Spaventa, as concrete as that was abstract, ran the historical and critical influence of Francesco de Sanctis. In his history of Italian literature, we see the latter turning away from the art of which he is the greatest critic, and facing the whole historical life of Italy at each period, in order to understand the literary works it produced. He then returns to each particular work with a mind filled with the observation of man's various activities. The work is thus an immense mirror in which, according to his ability, each Italian may see the life of his country reflected in the splendour or shame of ten centuries. In politics de Sanctis was a staunch liberal and definitely anticlerical; but in this work he never wrote against the Church. He had studied the political, intellectual, and spiritual life of Italy between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries; and his conclusions were, first that morals and with them

<sup>1</sup> See Gentile, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-77.

political life had decayed whenever religion had decayed, and secondly that art in such periods had flourished rapidly and died of starvation in a mere display of technique.

Gentile had there a definite illustration of the relation of the Absolute to the contingent. The development of the whole Western world was mirrored in the historical experience of one country. The Whole is contained in each part, though the part is not the Whole. What may seem a mysterious and even ridiculous proposition to others is a very simple and obvious statement to the idealist. If the parts are unconscious of the presence of the Whole in them, spiritual or political decay sets in. Gentile may not have understood this as clearly as we do who come after him; but it is a fact that he was ready to say then, as he has written much later :

‘The decadence of Italy was no more due to the Papacy than to the barbarians. These so-called causes of decadence, exterior as they were to the spirit of the people, were the effect much rather than the cause of it. The true cause of decadence, whether political or artistic, was always the lack of a religious conception of the world, entailing the lack of any moral consciousness and the reduction of political life to an unsystematic world of atoms, since it fostered the most complete individualism.’

In another of his youthful writings he appears a most rigorous Kantian, and here we have the earliest expression of his view of ‘History’ as a branch of learning, and of all the activities essential to the life of mind.<sup>1</sup> People too often mistake a regulative ideal for a constitutive end. In the case of history and of art, we have a regulative goal for the one and a constitutive goal for the other. Historical truth is what *ought to be* the end of history; but beauty is the actual achievement of the artist; art produces beauty while history strives to reach truth. Because these and

<sup>1</sup> Included in Giovanni Gentile, *Frammenti di Esthetica*, Lanciano, Carrara, 1920.

other difficulties had not been properly met by post-Kantian philosophy, a host of semi-philosophical writers could ask meaningless questions: what is the use of art? what is the use of religion? of history? of philosophy? In the case of religion its advocates tried to defend it—as if it needed defence!—and spoke of the soothing comfort it gives in the daily troubles of life, the serenity that it brings to the anxious mind, providing an explanation of the great problems of existence. To this others retorted that such and such a religion bred anxiety instead of serenity; and the unphilosophical advocates would reply that the religion instanced was not the *true* religion, implying that they knew which was the true religion, the only one that ought to exist. All this was philosophical nonsense to the disciple of Spaventa and de Sanctis. Such writers implicitly took for granted that the ideal religion existed as their archetype outside the positive historical religions, though they did not say so, and, a century after Kant, could not even have thought of saying so.

If we turn to history, that is, to experience, we see how impossible it is to postulate a universal existing historically outside individual cases. We meet in history with languages, constitutions, laws, never with *the one* language, *the one* law, or *the* ideal constitution. And on the other hand we see that the absolute reality of the languages as Self-expression, of the laws as the Law that makes all laws valid, of the various constitutions as the General Will which is the social self-realization that makes the citizens and therefore the city, *is present in every one of its historical embodiments*. In fact it is the degree in which it is present and realized in each of them that determines the value of the language, the law, or the constitution. Again philosophy, though it is the best mirror of national genius, is never national. There are national schools of philosophy which exhibit national characteristics; but if they are truly philosophical they must be rich in the speculative thought

of all mankind. For philosophy is that form of life in which a country is, as it were, summed up, with all its antecedents and its relation to the rest of the world; and for this reason it can and must have a universal character, like religion, though like religion again it must be, and actually is, coloured by national features. Both religion and philosophy must take national colour as they arise in this or that country; but both must remain the expression of the life of Mind, and not merely of this or that people.

## CHAPTER XVI

### GENTILE AGAINST MODERNISM

MODERNISM attracted the attention of Gentile very early, and roused in him a strong sense of philosophical hostility.<sup>1</sup> To it we owe the first of his writings on the nature of the relations between science and religion, philosophy and religion, politics and religion; while he owes to it the fanatical, blind, and personal hostility with which many so-called Catholic writers have repaid his attack on modernism. In that attack we find him from the very first as much Kantian as Hegelian; but because his adversaries were mostly under the impression that they were themselves Kantian, they branded him as Hegelian. The truth is that most of the modernists are earnest religious-minded men, and as such should not be treated without due regard to their moral worth. They represent a considerable effort to reconcile science and religion, with the intention of keeping for the latter its place in the modern life of men and justifying the hold it still has on their minds. We must, however, state at once that both the reconciliation and the justification are at best superfluous, and may cause great harm by the *confusion de genres* which roused Gentile's repugnance.

In his first encounter he appears as a non-Catholic thinker who can afford to look coldly on the eagerness displayed by modern Catholics in their attempt to bring faith and science to a friendly agreement. He is besides extremely young and critical; his cruel view of a tragic situation strikes one as being quite unlike him.

Can apologetics and history use the same methods? In other words, can the believer move towards the verification of what he believes to be true in the same manner as the historian? His conclusion is determined before he

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *Modernismo*, Laterza, Bari, 1921 [first ed. 1900].

starts his investigation; while the goal of the historian should be purely formal. The apologist, for instance, wishes to prove the truth of the traditional belief that St. Peter and St. Paul died in Rome; but the historian of the primitive churches wishes merely to know the historical truth about their deaths, and embarks on his search for evidence perfectly unbiased as to the result. The difference is considerable. From the point of view of scientific history we begin our investigations without knowing what the result will be, above all without knowing whether it will be a ratification of such and such traditions. On the other hand, from the point of view of religious apologetic we believe that we know beforehand what the result will be and must be, and that it must be not merely historical truth, but in agreement with this or that dogma, and this or that tradition. It is obvious that our investigation can have no value as far as history is concerned. It cannot meet the requirements of either science or history.

As a matter of fact it is neither reasonable nor logical to put science at the service of apologetics. The scientific apologist can only harm religion by putting it into a position of inferiority to science. It is not a case of inferiority or superiority; but if we apply scientific standards to a form of life the value of which is not scientific, it appears of necessity as falling short of that standard, and therefore as inferior to that form whose value is scientific. The attempt to bring about the union of faith and science is hopeless in the sense that it is not rational. How can a believer do any piece of research, when this implies that as a historian he ignores that to which as a believer he adheres all along?

Such is the first aspect of the relation between faith and science that we meet in Gentile's writing. Nothing could show better either the extent of his debt to Hegel or the profundity of the divergence that already existed between their views on the nature of religion. Clearly he did not consider the latter to be in any way speculative thought.

Nothing in his later work recalls the attitude and manner of this short article. His next, written only three years later, is far more like what has become his personal style. He deals with the works of Laberthonnière, which were bound to seem important to a writer who had taken such a keen interest in the *praxis* of Marx and had accepted the Kantian ethics as the one philosophical interpretation of the Christian Good Will. Laberthonnière writes that coming back into myself from the multiplicity of the phenomena—that is, from the world of sense—I assert my own being as one and permanent, inasmuch as I assert the Being in which the self of every man finds its unity and determination. *Je ne puis me trouver qu'en le trouvant*,<sup>1</sup> were his words, and nothing could be more consistent at once with the traditional Christian view and the highest philosophical speculation. His comment upon them was unfortunately not as sound, either from the orthodox Catholic point of view or on more philosophical grounds. Our personality is not suppressed and absorbed in that of God. This is quite true; but Laberthonnière had a special way of understanding it. What takes place according to him is a communion of our will with God's will, in which to lift oneself into God does not mean ceasing to be oneself; but merely to want what God wants. Such a transformation is love. It is not a taking possession of oneself but a giving up of oneself, and this gift presupposes self possession, for a man could not give what he did not possess; and this is autonomy. In their mutual love the two wills are unified; but they do not become one will; *they are still two*. This statement is not only unorthodox, but poor philosophy.

The modernists interpret Kant in such a way that his doctrine is reduced to that subjective idealism which he

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by G. G. from P. L. Laberthonnière, *Essais de philosophie religieuse*, Lethielleux, Paris, 1903, pp. 85, 86; but the whole essay *Le Dogmatisme Moral* should be read.



hated so much. For Kant the will of man is indeed autonomous; but only in so far as it transcends itself and makes itself one with the will of God. Whether we follow the Roman Catholic theology or Kant's teaching, man's will is never entirely of the flesh and never entirely empirical. The nature of man, even without any supernatural help, beyond the famous *Gratia sufficiens*, is endowed by God with the latent power of overcoming his limitations and the negative influence of the flesh. This means obviously that the spirit is in man as a positive force, strong or weak, at whatever stage of the spiritual life we may care to take him. In consequence not only is there in man a perpetual struggle between the flesh and the spirit, but man is that struggle, and the degree of man's goodness, that is, of the goodness of his will, is in direct proportion to the degree in which he has triumphed over the negative part and realized himself as the concrete embodiment of the positive forces, namely the will of God. Turning now to Kant, we can, thanks to his much-abused terminology, make the point quite briefly. Man's will is the Good Will as far as he transcends his particular, empirical will, in order to will with the Universal will. Laberthonnière, and like him many others, overlooks just this point, that to transcend one's particular will is to become one with the Transcendental Self. Kant to be sure is not as clear as we could wish; but the reader who scans him carefully word by word without losing sight of his insistence on the *homogeneity* of the moral will, is bound to realize that he intends man to pass beyond the stage in which there is his particular will with its particular purpose, in order to become one with the transcendental will with its purely universal purpose.

To will God's will because it is God's will, *and for no other reason*, is according to orthodox Christian theology to win one's liberty and triumph over the negative forces of the world; because it means becoming one with God,

and this is the ideal communion with him. Few, however, come near the goal, and no human being can reach it perfectly, for the very reason that the dualism remains, the dualism of flesh and spirit which *entails the struggle that is man*; and in those few there are many degrees of sanctity, *homogeneity*, and communion. The ideal, however, is and must be the perfect communion, in which saints *put off the old man and renouncing themselves in deed and in truth become one with God*. To cease to desire a particular good, and to desire the Good just because it is the Good and for no other reason, is, according to Kant, to realize our autonomy and to triumph over our limitations and our negativity; for it is to transcend our empirical will and to be actually the transcendental will with no trace of *heterogeneity*. Less human than the Church, less acquainted with the innumerable variety of the relations between transcendental and empirical which determine the value of each individual at each given moment, Kant gives us little warning of the difficulty encountered by individual human beings in approaching that goal, or of the impossibility of reaching it altogether. Hence the problems met by his followers and the errors incurred by many of them, including Laberthonnière.

To Frenchmen especially the trap was bound to be dangerous. The positivism of the best of them led them to test in their own experience the theories of the great German; and they did not make allowance for the abstract nature of the treatment of this or that point. Even in the best of their moral and religious experience, they found two wills; and unconsciously they held to the temporal and spatial system of which God, the Transcendental Self, is the negation. The result was that the bilateral relation, I willing God's Will, appeared not only as an historical fact but as a constitutive instead of a regulative ideal. God willing His will did not absorb me, otherwise I could not have willed His will. In short, Laberthonnière maintained

that to will His will, or to give myself up to Him, I must have an independent existence. This is mathematically clear; one could almost give algebraical demonstration of the fact.

Unfortunately neither theology nor philosophy can be as neat and clear as that. However religiously minded he was, Laberthonnière when arguing in this way made man capable of willing God's will without discarding his negative humanity. He simply mistook the more or less successful efforts of a good man doing his best, for the regulative ideal itself; that is, the perfect communion of man with God. The point here is that the best of good men falls short of the Good; and that this best is good as far as, and no farther than, man has succeeded in denying himself (as the Church bids him do), in transcending himself (as philosophy expresses the matter). The immanence of such modernists is an empirical immanence. Clinging to the dualistic character of the relation of man to God, they profess that God is in man, and can be in man, while man is still other than God. Transcendental immanence can only mean that God is in man *as far as* man transcends his empirical self, that is, triumphs over the flesh, and becomes one with God. Man, however, would cease to have a concrete historical existence if he succeeded in discarding all that is empirical in him, namely his flesh. We know that no man has ever transcended himself absolutely. Theology will say that man cannot do this; history can only say that to the best of our knowledge he has not done so; science, more dogmatic, sides with theology, since such *transhumanation* would entail death; and philosophy can only state that in such a condition the man would cease to be an object of experience and so of speculation.

Clinging to the independence of man in relation to God, and mistaking that independence for the autonomy which he can only win through the sacrifice of the former, they are bound to cling also to a mythical transcendence of God. By

myth we mean here something imagined or conceived under the conditions of the senses, and as such subject to time and space. Indeed they have learnt their Hegel only too well; but they have secured only that which is to be rejected, namely his insistence that religion is a form of knowledge requiring two terms and their relation.

Returning now to Gentile, we find that he ascribes their clinging to transcendence to their Catholicism. We have said enough to prove that any half-Kantian, that is, any follower of Kant who understands only what is subjective in him, comes inevitably to this dualism, in which God as the object must be distinguished in space and time from the subject. If further proof were needed, we could appeal to any one familiar with the philosophical thinking of non-Catholic countries. There there are to be found religious, scientific, or half-philosophical people who seem to be just as unable to go the whole way with Kant. To follow Kant to the end is not within the power of any one who insists on maintaining the independence of man's will, whether he be Catholic or not. We have met with several people exceedingly well read, churchmen and laymen of several countries, who when asked what they meant by the transcendence to which they cling and the immanence of which they speak with such apprehension, could give no meaning at all for either word.

Every one has passed through the stage of realism or naïve idealism which rests peacefully and dogmatically on the belief in the absolute reality of temporal and spatial relations. At that stage it is impossible not only to conceive but even to imagine relations with a reality that is actually the negation of space and time. Since we have all passed through this stage, we can all appreciate the point of view of those who cling to it. Few on the other hand have been able, or being able have taken the trouble, to reach a sufficient understanding of this timeless and spaceless reality, and of these but a small number have

succeeded in their attempt. The rest therefore cannot appreciate their point of view. It is not a question of whether they are Catholics or not; and as for the modernists, they have a philosophical weakness which causes them to waver between transcendental and empirical immanence, whatever the Church to which they belong.

Turning to Gentile once more, we find him at his best when dealing with that *praxis* which has always been so interesting a problem to him. For Kant the law of our will is our will itself; but even granting that, the *a priori* theory modifies not only the notion of our theoretic activity, but the whole notion of the self and the subject. When we are not merely an empirical will we are a transcendental will as well. There is nothing in the nature of this transcendental will to prevent our calling it the Good Will, with the traditional meaning of man's own will in communion with God's will and becoming one with it. Gentile and Laberthonnière agree that Kant has given us the philosophy of the will and of liberty. Not that they consider that he originated it; it is the very ground of Christianity—or, as we should prefer to say, of Christian ethics—and of every doctrine that does not misunderstand morals. For both of them the recognition of the pre-eminence of Practical Reason is the true beginning of the philosophy of Mind, or of liberty. We may add that if it is so, it is because it is the first philosophy that ceases to draw upon ancient and pagan philosophy and draws directly upon the Gospels and experience.

Gentile was not at this time as learned as he became later in the Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers and the medieval theologians or even those of the seventeenth century. Had he known then as he did later the theories of grace, liberty, and justification, these essays would have been very different. His criticism is indeed sharp, consistent, and just, but it still lacks the depth to which his readers have now become accustomed, and

which had even then distinguished his previous work on Marx. We find little of the sympathy with which he usually approaches the author whom he is criticizing, and his statement of the matter in hand is one-sided. He appears no more than a very good Kantian, and if this is not little, it is little in comparison with what he was by the time he dealt with the same problems again in his essays on Vico ten years later.

He writes of the natural and supernatural, for instance, with the air of one whose interest is not really roused. He pursues his author into a controversy on this subject with the careful but indifferent air of a critic who does not trouble to consider whether this *supernatural* of the churchman might not transcend the *natural* in the same way as the *transcendental* of the philosopher transcends the *empirical*. Yet the importance of these papers is partly due to this indifference, so offensive to people who are ready to lay down their lives for their convictions; for it gives to all that he does say in favour of religion a character of logical necessity and impartiality which makes it more valuable than the works of the best apologists. There, at the beginning of his career, he is sure that idealism alone will serve life and conquer. Philosophy alone can elaborate the principles of truth which were first drawn in their intuitive form from the New Testament and then brought to a rational form by the Fathers of the Church and the great scholastic doctors.

Thus, though he has traced the relation of faith and science in a way that has already taken him far beyond Hegel, he concludes on a very Hegelian note. As these essays have been more carefully read by church people than his more difficult works, it is not surprising that they should believe that with Hegel and Croce he considers religion as an elementary stage of philosophy. Moreover the definite distinction which he drew between religion and learning, whether scientific or historical, was not likely

to win for him the regard of believers. To the superficial reader it seemed that religion was made inferior to science; and it required very careful reading to see that by declaring their heterogeneity and the impossibility of measuring the one by the standard of the other, Gentile had as good as stated that religion was in itself a form of the life of mind with a standard and value of its own.

We may now anticipate his later work, the philosophy of education and the logic, and give here the groundwork of that distinction which he drew for the first time in this article. Each science has for its formal object truth, and for its constitutive object a particular and definite field of investigation. This does not imply that all the various sciences do not to a great extent, and philosophy and religion to a less extent, influence these strictly determined branches of knowledge. The experience of man is a perfectly welded whole, a universe in which every single thing affects everything else; but this does not mean that it is an undifferentiated whole. In science we all know that the more circumscribed is the object of its inquiry, the more definite its methods, and the more strictly specialized its equipment, the more scientific will be the results and the more fruitful it will be for the rest of the whole. Religion and philosophy, on the other hand, have their formal object, truth, in common with science; but they have no particular realm of knowledge for their constitutive object, which is truth manifesting itself in its universal forms. And as it is the end which determines the kind, we can safely say that science cannot be in rivalry with religion, because they are not of the same kind. As distinct forms of what is theoretical in spiritual life they are not homogeneous; and the one cannot be measured by the standard of the other. They cannot compete in any way.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CATHOLICISM AND PROTESTANTISM

It is more difficult to present Gentile's views on religion than Hegel's, because he has not published any work on that subject except a fairly recent volume which is a mere collection of speeches required for or adapted to special occasions. We have, therefore, to search for stray references to the subject, and this takes us mainly into his minor writings. The third of his essays on modernism dealt with the encyclical *Pascendi*, and here his philosophical sense and his understanding of concrete life put him on the side of the Church, not as a Catholic, but as a philosopher and historian. Already, however, we find his mind so formed and moulded by Roman Catholic surroundings that he is apt to hurt Protestant feelings, as Hegel is to hurt Catholic pride.

Modernism was for him the result of the inevitable contrast of modern philosophy with the most eminent, or rather the only, historical form of religion of our Western civilization. For the modern man learning, scientific, historical, or philosophical, may take the place of religion; and this is all very well if he is satisfied to live within the limits of his own sphere. On the other hand, if he will take 'history', in Gentile's sense of life and actual concrete experience, as his field, he is bound to realize that his philosophy does not govern the world of thought and practice. However independent philosophical thought may have seemed to be since the Renaissance, only those who ignore actual life and experience can believe that the philosophy of the Church is dead. The philosophy of life which is the substance of the Roman Catholic doctrine, and of every form of religion as such, is far from dead. Catholicism seemed to Gentile even then the most perfect form of religion, as European philosophy seems the most



perfect form of philosophy. In fact they are for him the most perfect creations of the Aryan mind. The first has organized logically—in spite of all its contradictions—the fundamental needs of the religious mind; it has maintained the opposition and fostered the intrinsic relation between man and God, the finite and the infinite. The second is gradually resolving the contradiction implicit in these spiritual needs; it sets the opposition back into concrete actual life, where it becomes the principle of the development of the unity of man with God, of the finite with the infinite.

The Church of Rome has availed itself of one of the phases of European philosophy, in making use of Platonism (or neoplatonism) and Aristotelianism; for it found there developed the concept of opposition side by side with that of relation. It seemed natural to Gentile that the church should have stopped short, in its presuppositions and conclusions, at that stage which is purely religious; but he here ignores the development of theology that had taken place in the sixteenth century mainly in Spain, and in the seventeenth century mainly in France. Philosophy, however, has continued to develop precisely because of this introduction at the hands of Descartes of whatever in such theological works was vital to its development. For no other reason can we say that in Kant it has eventually grasped the principle of Christian life and triumphed over the old metaphysic that presumed to know a reality independent of man's thought, or shall we say, of his experience as a whole. Gentile maintains that from the dogma of grace to that of papal infallibility catholicism is the system of opposition, in which God is external to the human mind. This statement shows how little he then knew of theology. God cannot be external or internal, since he is the negation of space. A thorough understanding of the conception of God as taught by the Church is necessary for an understanding of the dogma of grace.

Even that of papal infallibility is connected with the conception of God as Truth, but not as closely so as the other. We are not concerned here with dogma; but we must expose this philosophical slip of Gentile's, since it has a good deal to do with his views on the church and religion. God was before me, as He is with me and will be after me. Again, God is outside me, as He is I; but what does this mean if not that he transcends me? It was an unfortunate slip, for it has led him to misunderstand also the essential characteristic of Protestantism. It is only fair to say that if it leads him into error, it is a traditional error, though it is most unlike him to take the beaten track. In fact, he may have gone that way simply because he was not historically equipped to go any other when he could make the following statement:

'The protest of the Reformation—Gioberti was right—was the Cartesianism of theology: it is a definite negation of the opposition of God to man, of the transcendence which is the very essence of the religious and non-philosophical mind; and it is, or rather it is well known that it has been, the principle of dissolution of religion as a form of mind distinct from philosophy. *Private judgement* is no longer the spiritual organ of religion, but *free reason* that begins to be conscious of its own immanent divinity.'

This calls for a flat contradiction. It is well known that people have thought so and said so for some three centuries, we need not here ask why. To the superficial historian the fact that this movement manifested itself by rejecting the power of the Church may have been a sufficient ground for thinking so. If we do not shrink from technicalities we shall realize how little *free reason* was proclaimed by Protestantism, how little this was meant to be a form of philosophy, and finally how much this misrepresentation wrongs both Catholicism and Protestantism.

There is a work which is immune from the political and personal motives which may have warped the opinions expressed in deeds or words by the founders of the various

Protestant churches. Its author was a man of unblemished character and so little moved by personal ambition that he meant the work of reformation to take place within the church, and even tried to secure for it the traditional channel of some important religious order. Finally, the book was not published until after his death. As to the Protestant character of the work, every one has agreed to brand it or proclaim it as such. The date of its publication was, moreover, near enough to the Reformation for Protestant readers to remember the spirit of their founders, and yet far enough away for them to know why they themselves held the reformed churches to be right and the old church to be wrong. The book is of course the *Augustinus*, and the author Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, as learned a theologian as any university professor of his day.

Now let us see why the Catholics brand him as a Protestant in the most definite and persistent manner, and the Protestants welcome him as such in a manner no less definite. He has himself stated his purpose. He meant first of all to do away with theology, because theology as a rational construction of the human mind had perverted the Christian doctrine. It is not only to the *free use of reason* common to the period of humanism and the Renaissance that he objects; the evil which he wishes to root out had grown up far back in the period of Scholasticism. The free use of reason has perverted the Christian doctrine which is *given* and must remain purely given. It has, moreover, provoked the belief in the power of man's reason. Therefore secondly—he is indeed the most consistent person that ever worded the protest—he wishes to insist that man's efforts, *man's natural intelligence, man's natural will are of no avail*. The Word is *given*; man's inner light is granted to him by God in His bounty, and *is also given*. Only grace *which is irresistible* can achieve man's illumination as well as his salvation; and for this reason he wishes thirdly to bring it home to men that what-

ever the zeal with which they read the Scriptures or pray, they do so entirely by the will of God, and owing to this grace. We have therefore three *given* terms, Truth or the Revelation, the light of the Understanding or Reason, and Grace without which the second may not be used.<sup>1</sup>

If this is so, human interpretation can have no value. Hence no historical development is possible, and no historical society is needed to embody it. The Church with a capital C is superfluous. Whether Jansenius had drawn this last conclusion or not, the Protestants drew it, and claimed him as their own kin on good grounds. As for the Catholics, they felt at once that if man has no liberty, the Church has no *raison d'être*. If man's interpretation has no liberty, it has no value and no discipline is required, because it is not worth disciplining; if it has no liberty in the sense of autonomy, which makes man the collaborator of God, it cannot be fruitful and entail a development of doctrine in a progressive society. The church must be abandoned. It was not, however, in opposition to Jansenius that Roman Catholic theology elaborated its theory of liberty and rejected predestination once for all. This had already been done by two Spanish Jesuits,<sup>2</sup> Fonseca and Molina, and it was against them that Jansenius wrote the *Augustinus*. They had developed the doctrine set forth in an article of the constitution given by St. Ignatius of Loyola to the Society of Jesus, in which he had advised the members to deal cautiously with the problem of grace, so as not to diminish the liberty of man or the importance of his good works, clearly wishing to guard them from the Protestant doctrine on the same point.

If the protest of the Reformation is the Cartesianism of

<sup>1</sup> See Corn. Jansenius, *Augustinus*, Tomus II, *Liber Proemialis* for the uselessness of human reason; and Tomus III, lib. II, chap. xxvii; lib. III, chaps. xiii and xxi for the uselessness of the human will.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 21-2.

theology, then Descartes has brought us back to Parmenides, and is the herald of pure, stony, inhuman objectivity. Protestantism does not indeed stand for such objectivity, simply because it is a form of religion; it is a reaction against the worldly culture and loose ways of the Church, and the lawlessness due to the human element in it. In short it wished to do away with the human element in the Church, both in its theology and its organization. It wished to do away with man, i.e. the human share in religion, who is and can be nothing but an element of corruption. Indeed, Descartes came very near the Protestant denial of liberty; but neither Gioberti nor Gentile could have known it, for it has only been worked out by Étienne Gilson since they wrote. They thought of Descartes as the subjective thinker who put into philosophic language the subjective and individualist thought of France, demanding the recognition not only of human reason but of every man's reason. His early pre-Jansenistic but Jansenistic views on liberty Descartes had himself timidly laid aside, when he realized that they sounded Protestant and were likely to cause him trouble.

We do not wish to imply that all the Protestant churches rest exclusively on that relation of man to God which allows no liberty to man whatsoever; this would not be historically true. Nor do we mean that the emphasis on God's objectivity is lacking in the Roman Church; this would be no less false. One of the greatest and most distinguished religious orders seems indeed to have no other task than that of stressing this divine objectivity. Nevertheless it must be understood that if either of the two sides stresses the opposition to the point of overlooking the free use of man's reason, it is Protestantism. Any Quaker meeting will prove that this is still so. Any one there who begins to speak is moved to it by God, and avoids most carefully speaking of his own free will. On the other hand the political element, in the sense of social organization, which has been so much

blamed in the Roman Church, is the best proof that all down the ages it has accorded *value* to man's reason and action. Where there is no liberty there can be no discipline, for it is only free thinking and free action that calls for control. If we return now to Gentile we shall find him saying with Harnack much that is inconsistent with his own statement that '*the protest of the Reformation is a definite negation of that opposition or transcendence of God which is the very essence of the religious and non-philosophical mind.*' This view wrongs both Protestantism and Catholicism, and we could not therefore let it pass.

Gentile does not wish his reader to oppose Catholicism to philosophy so absolutely that the latter should be viewed as external to the former, for Catholicism would then appear as an abstraction and not an historical fact. Its fundamental dogma of the God-man is sufficient to pervade it with the intrinsic relation of the finite to the infinite. This, however, is not the prevailing theme in it, according to Gentile (though here again we must disagree, for surely the church boasts no other justification than its being the historical human body of Christ). This dogma acts, he thinks, like yeast, producing by its fermentation all other dogmas, and forming the principle of intrinsic contradiction that never succeeds in resolving itself. And the resolution is neither possible nor desirable, for Catholicism would either resolve itself into philosophy, or into the annihilation of the spirit. The resolution of religion into philosophy, which Hegel considered possible and extremely desirable, is ruled out by Gentile as being neither the one nor the other. Religion may be, and is in the case of Catholicism, philosophical, but it must not become philosophy. We may add that philosophy may be, and is wherever it is good, religious, but it must not become religion.

Gentile is convinced that the characteristic of religion in general and of Catholicism in particular is to relate man to God in such a way that whatever the degree of com-

munion which the believer may reach, he will remain conscious of the opposition essential to such a relation. This implies two tendencies, one leading man to desire the annulment of the opposition, the other leading him to accept the unfathomable difference. In St. Paul's view the dogma of grace might seem to imply the annulment; but no single man's view, however great or saintly he may be, can be considered as the doctrine of the Church. Ten centuries before, the council in which the rest of his doctrine was glorified had declared that St. Augustine's view of predestination of reprobates *was not to be taught*. So that when the Church asserted at the Council of Trent both the right of man's nature and the value of grace, it was giving a dogmatic value to what had been all through its traditional teaching. And we may conclude with Gentile, 'Woe to the Church if it had with Luther yielded to pure Augustinianism!' <sup>1</sup>

According to German historians and most non-Catholic writers the dogma of the necessity of the Church is due to the political spirit of Rome triumphing over German individualism in the sphere of religion. This view is equally shallow from the philosophical and from the historical point of view, though it is only a misrepresentation of the truth. If by political they mean social or rather historical, it is true that the dogma of the Church is justified, from a non-religious point of view, simply because there can be no spiritual human life that is not corporate. The *πόλις* is the visible and historical body of social life. The Church is the visible and historical body of Jesus Christ living in his followers, in other words it is the body of the spiritual life common to all Christians; and

<sup>1</sup> Reference to Harnack's works is sufficient to prevent us from considering this theory of liberty and grace as due to a new and modern conception of God, since Pelagianism in the fourth century was due to a distortion of it; although B. Groethuysen has recently done so: see his *Origine de l'Esprit bourgeois en France*, Gallimard, Paris, 1927, pp. 98-129.

the Pope is the voice and embodiment of Jesus Christ continuing through the ages the *ipse dixit*. The empirical triumph over individualism, and above all over German individualism, is an old legend whose origin it would be interesting to trace.

Organization and discipline are the spontaneous projections of liberty and individualism. The English public schools provide perhaps the best illustration of the fact. It often seems strange that free and autonomous as these are, life in them should be so much organized and corporal punishment still used. The contradiction is but apparent. Liberty in the modern—that is the Christian in opposition to the Pagan—sense of the word means autonomy, that is, liberty to do something having value for any purpose, which is personally willed. Now whether this be playing cricket or saving my soul, it is essentially a rational activity, an activity in which thought and action meet. And because thought and action always mean expanding, and exteriorizing myself, I meet the thought and action of others, and this would mean paralysing me or them, if our activities were not rational; for they would not combine, but conflict and neutralize each other. As, however, an autonomous activity is essentially rational, that is, directed to a given end willed by the autonomous individual, it necessarily transcends me. It takes shape in action, it organizes itself with a discipline, which is in direct proportion to the autonomy and rationality of the will. Three dissenters meeting in a parlour to voice their dissent and communicate their aspirations form a congregation, which is the historical embodiment of their common aspirations and dissent, and has rules, however much they may wish to ignore the fact, even where the sole rule is *that they shall have no rules*. History itself is an illustration. The freer man becomes, the more highly organized his life is bound to be. Too often sheer independence is mistaken for the liberty which is autonomy and responsibility.



If the common view mentioned above means that the Church of Rome is political in the sense that it gives due satisfaction to this requirement of human life, which to be human, that is spiritual and social, must embody and organize itself, then the characteristic is bound to hold good for all religions as such. If, on the other hand, it alludes to the political life of the Roman pontiffs, then it falls outside the scope of our inquiry, for it is not characteristic of religion, and is merely accidental to the Church as a church.

Gentile quotes from Loisy's book, *L'Évangile et l'Église*,<sup>1</sup> a passage which may usefully be repeated here, as, from a quite different standpoint, it ascribes the vitality of the Roman Church to just those characteristics which we have selected as being from a philosophical point of view essential to religion and therefore to any church:

'Piety was not lacking in any of the fractions of ancient Christianity; and it has given rise to the special development of that Church owing to the works of St. Augustine and to the influence of Augustinianism as a whole. According to Harnack, since the 5th century the history of Western Christianity is determined by the relation of two factors: the spirit of piety tending to make of religion a personal concern, and the spirit of government tending to make of religion an official matter regulated through and through by the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff. The extreme limit of the first is religious individualism, that of the second ecclesiastical absolutism; their balancing each other determines the life of Christianity, which would wane away did either of these tendencies cease to balance the other. Protestantism continues to be a religion by retaining a remnant of hierarchy and of traditional organization; and Catholicism draws its vitality at least as much from the ardent and intimate sense of piety in its adherents as from the firmness of its hierarchical bonds and the rigour of its central administration.'

All this, put into philosophical terms by Gentile, means that the ecclesiastical dogma of Catholicism, rightly

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Loisy, *L'Évangile et l'Église*, Picard, Paris, 1902, pp. 49-150.

considered as essential to the life of that form of religion *qua* religion, rests upon the equilibrium between the subjective and intimate relation of man with God and the opposition of God to man (and consequently of the hierarchical organization of its mediations, whether didactic or disciplinary).

We cannot be satisfied with this conclusion, nor with the sentence in the quotation: 'The extreme limit of the first is religious individualism, &c.' How can the spirit of piety which manifests itself in mysticism be in its extreme form religious individualism, since the most essential characteristic of mystical experience is the annihilation of the individual? In religious experience the only form in which the relation of man to God is a truly bi-lateral relation is that in which full recognition is granted to the individual man, as an historical agent, i.e. believing subject. The greater the value of his share in the process by which he is raised unto God, the greater is the need for the historical organization and discipline of his religious life. This is obvious enough and for no other reason does the need for Church and priest disappear with the value of human reason whenever mysticism prevails. It is when and only when the religious experience is purely mystical, that immediacy is reached; because under no other circumstances is the individual annihilated as an individual and lost in God. There is obviously no need of disciplinary and hierarchial organization where man has as far as possible disappeared or ceased to be a free agent.

Mysticism is indeed the most characteristic form of religious experience. Its importance as a regulative ideal cannot be overrated; but it is not a principle of individualism, nor is it the *subjective* relation of man to God. It is the negation of man and of the individual subject, whilst it is the profound and solemn affirmation of God as the All and as the Object.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MYSTICISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

MYSTICISM is considered here as the one form of life in which the mind of the subject proceeds to a self-surrender that must be as complete as possible. It is therefore by no means individualistic; since it entails man's renunciation of himself and of his value as man. If it is singled out as the one form of life in which man is religious, obviously enough all social and external forms of religion disappear, with all sanction and discipline, because in religion so understood nothing that man does can matter. Reality and value are all centred in the Object; man is, so to speak, cancelled; that is, he would be cancelled if that form of religious experience was ever perfectly attained. This, however, is seldom or never the case, and the perfection of mystical experience is in direct proportion to the self-surrender of the individual. As for the protest of the Reformation within as well as outside the Roman Catholic Church, it was a much needed and healthy reaction against the individualism that had developed too rapidly and spread all through life without being checked by the Church; because the Church was itself pervaded with that individualism, especially in the highest strata of its hierarchy.

Returning to Gentile, we shall find him enlarging upon our thesis and leading us to a further statement of it. For him whosoever finds God in himself and by himself through his piety has no need of priests; but, on the other hand, the priest, with his own value, which presupposes faith, is no priest at all without the inner piety that draws the believer towards him, as to the teacher of divinity. We have here in a nutshell the whole truth about any ecclesiastical body. It is impossible to say that Church organization, with its ritual and hierarchy, is a mask

behind which there is no faith and no piety; and it is still more impossible to say that to embody faith is to kill it; for the whole organization is bound to collapse if faith and piety even show signs of disappearing. The Church is a body, and it dissipates itself like any other body if its soul, that is faith and piety, begins to fade away.

Certainly, Gentile goes on, there is a contradiction between individualism—he should have said the negation of individualism—and what Harnack has called politicism.

‘Hence,’ he writes, ‘the old protestantism and modernism are right to develop the principle of individualism [he means, surely, mysticism] and avoid the principle of politicism. Generally speaking, however, it is logical that they should fail to reach transcendence starting as they do from immanence; whereas the greatness of Catholicism consists in the contradiction [we should have preferred “opposition”]. All the flames of mysticism that blaze out from time to time in the bosom of the Church are bound to die out; and Protestantism itself seems to prelude its own end as a religion and its transformation into a natural religion which is philosophy. Catholicism always triumphs and lives on through the centuries. The reason is that contradictions must not be resolved by the negation of one of the contradictory terms both of which have their profound and inevitable *raison d’être*; but only through the assertion, that is to say through the realization, of the superior unity in which the contrary terms are coincident. In the Church of Rome the problem is unsolved; the mystics have the solution but never really feel the problem; hence their manifest inferiority, and their fatal defeat *on religious grounds* in their opposition to Catholicism. . . . It is therefore useless, worse than useless, idle, to lament the scanty religiosity or intimacy of Catholicism. It is what it must be, for it is that equilibrium which cannot be preserved except through the sacrifice of piety on the one hand and of social organization on the other, of the inner life just as much as of its exterior manifestation of liberty and authority. It cannot be helped, one must bow to the fact, To rebel is to act like children who do not as yet understand the hard necessities of life.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *Il Modernismo*, Laterza, Bari, pp. 45, 46.

We were right in maintaining that mysticism is the negation of one of the terms of the religious relation of man to God; and Gentile himself provides the evidence; on his own showing it is and must be fatal to religious experience for one of the terms to be lost. If you remove man and his reason, individuality is abolished, and the experience, as far as the self-surrender is complete, is abolished also, and religion dies out in feeling. If you stress man's individuality, the experience is purely subjective, and religion becomes a natural deism, which is an inferior form of philosophy.

All human experience is life, and life always requires a body. If it is organic it requires an organic and physical body; if it is spiritual, it requires an organic and historical body. What truly lives even in the most intimate recess of man's bosom must come forth, must become objective and external, or die; and what truly lives there of a spiritual life spontaneously shapes its own historical body, being compelled to do so by the necessity of transcending itself, of transcending its actual determination in time and space, that is, of realizing itself as Spirit. It is therefore equally absurd to think that religion can exist without an organic and historical body, and to think that a Church or ecclesiastical body can exist in time and space without the faith and piety which call it into being and alone can keep it alive. In any Church worthy of the name, the two necessary forms of religious experience must be present for ever and be for ever active. The recognition of God as absolutely other than myself and the aspiration to overcome this absolute otherness are the two and the only two indispensable elements of religious life. As far as man is an essential term in the relation, his knowing God, his acknowledging Him, his praying to Him, his good works done according to his knowledge of what He is and what He wills, all these are of the highest importance, value, and reality. They are his religious life, and like all

spiritual and human life they require an organization which is and must be their own historical body. The creed, rational though it must be, cannot become philosophy without calling forth an individualism which is the more dangerous in that it springs from religion and therefore considers itself lawful, and develops to such an extent that in its turn it calls forth a reaction leading to mysticism and the breaking down of the social organization of the historical body. History shows that this has usually happened in the bosom of the Church, the process of reformation never entailing schisms except on political or economic grounds.

Now at the end of the fifteenth century scholasticism, having ascertained the validity of rational thinking, proceeded to set a limit to it; the limit was removed, or strictly speaking ignored, by the individualism fostered by the rationalism of the Aristotelian Churchmen. It is an historical fact that intellectual life became so subjective that philosophy suffered a decline. Science and art could flourish, but speculative thought was enfeebled, for like religion it requires true objectivity; what mattered to the humanists was form; and the progress that was made in philosophy was due to the discipline given by science and practical life. In science, in politics, even in spiritual life, progress could be made on utilitarian lines; the useful took the place of the good, as it does whenever individualism puts the single self, man, in the place of the Self which is the ground both of his self and of his not-self. Hence the corruption was greater where the rationalism had been most thorough and had developed most consistently the conception of man that runs through humanism; that is, in the Church, and specially in the Church in Italy. It is a most surprising perversion of facts that has led cultured Europe to see this the other way about. Yet men who, like Harnack, have had the knowledge required to see it clearly have unconsciously distorted the historical

phenomenon, and therefore fallen into contradictions. He has written, as we have seen, that protestantism is the principle of individualism; on the other hand it was obvious to him that the history of the Church was nothing but a process through which Pelagianism had been gradually developed in the bosom of the Church, and Augustinianism gradually rejected from its life.<sup>1</sup> Being the foremost historian of dogma he has analysed Pelagianism and rightly as the tendency, due to Christian rationalism, to develop an individualism which emphasizes man and his liberty to the extent of becoming atheism, since it entails the negation of God. This statement however is obviously not consistent with the first. In order to state the truth which his evidence indicates, he should have said that Protestantism is a reaction against rationalism and individualism; and that these had developed Pelagian and individualistic tendencies at the expense of mysticism in particular, and of morality and objectivity in general.

The protest of the Reformation, within as well as outside the Church, has not checked the development of individualism, but modified it in a very healthy manner. Pelagianism is not only destructive of religion, it not only brings about the eclipse of God; it is also anti-social, and through utilitarianism it leads to anarchy, and so to a tyranny as brutal as that to which materialism leads. The wholesomeness of that movement of reform is due to its stressing, and indeed overstressing, of the Object, which was required to make the greatest individualists realize that I am myself only in my relation to the not-self; and that the individual is not exclusively the self, but self and not-self, I in relation to the rest of the world. Mysticism, however, is just as anti-social and anti-religious as rationalism; because it condemns religion, whilst it becomes itself mere feeling in pietism, and a veiled materialism in a natural religion that is an inferior form of philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *op. cit.* See specially bk. ii, chaps. i and v.

Speaking of this religious philosophy, Gentile writes:

'If we could altogether find God in us, and understand Him only according to our vital needs (a fashionable translation of what used to be called *finis spiritus* . . .), the church would be destroyed as the traditional elaborating power of the revelation, or rather as that revelation itself and therefore the extrinsic manifestation of the divine to the spirit. For the upholders of such theories the religious needs of mind could only be satisfied through the rational elaboration of the object which has been found in mind; it could only be satisfied by philosophy creating God. It is no use protesting that one cannot conceive religion except as a social function of mind, as the consciousness (so to speak) of the historical mind which has lived, as some writers put it, in the collectivity. Either this society, this church, is created by mind, created anew by the philosophizing mind, and we have left altogether both church and religion; or the church is the historical and actual church, that church which is well or badly represented by Pius X, and we must humbly keep silent when Pius speaks, remembering that truth does not belong to the individual but to the Church.'<sup>1</sup>

In the light of these controversial writings Gentile's view as to the essential difference between religion and philosophy is easily understood. Religion is both extrinsic and intrinsic to man; philosophy is purely intrinsic. Religion is not purely a creation of the human and historic mind; philosophy is entirely so. On the other hand they share the same object; and though each of them is both thought and action, the former prevails in philosophy to the point of making it *appear* the very symbol of theoretical life, whilst in religion they are so intimately welded that we find that form of the life of mind often considered as practical and quite as often as philosophy. We may state, not as Gentile's view but as our own, though on grounds afforded by his writing, that religion is less speculative and more historical, less logical and more social, because it is thought and action un-

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Gentile, op. cit., pp. 46, 47.



differentiated. Philosophy cannot start from hypotheses as science does. However fruitful they may be they are contraband in philosophy, whose realm is knowledge, the realm of what is already known and experienced. Neither can religion start from postulates, however high the degree of their probability; its realm is that of certitude, the certitude however which springs from belief. The creed cannot be an hypothesis, for the hypothetical spirit is the most powerful enemy of religion; neither can it be a philosophical tenet, for philosophy must always first of all create anew its own ground, and this critical process is alien to religion. The creed is, and must be, a *given*; though it has no meaning or efficacy without the belief or acceptance of the faithful: it must remain a *given* in order to illuminate the thought and determine the deeds of man immediately and directly. It is essential to the nature of belief that its import should be accepted as a given, and not as a given in the Kantian sense, which means a *taken*; but a given which on man's side is a *taken* only in the sense of *accepted* and not at all in the sense of *constructed*. The logical given implies as a condition *sine qua non* the activity of the perceiving mind; I may walk in the street and look blankly at a friend whom I do not see. The religious given implies generally, though perhaps not always, the will to believe; and such is the justification of the *credo quia absurdum*, together with the essential feature of belief as distinct from knowledge, *I choose to believe*. If I knew, no act of will would be required. On the other hand, the will to believe implies the will to pray the object of belief, the will to act according to one's belief in the nature of that object; hence the universal capacity for belief entails prayer and morality, and may perchance entail the supremacy of practical reason.

To believe is indeed to think, but it is not to know; it is indeed to accept in thought what we may or may not know. Belief, however, does not exclude knowledge, it is not an

opposite of knowledge, their relation is that of two distinct factors or elements in the life of mind; and we would venture to say that as common to both thought and action it is the essential ground of knowing and doing. Thus it is rational thought and rational action; thus again it is the ground of all forms of learning and the first principle of all social life. Just as philosophy and scientific knowledge are present all through human life, in differing degrees, so belief is present in science and philosophy; but we should not conclude that it can be reduced to either of these. Scientific knowledge determines the effort of the wood-cutter who lifts his axe so that the greater distance may increase the force of the stroke due to his own strength and to the weight of the axe. Yet nobody would call scientific his experience in the handling of the axe. Philosophical thinking determines the hesitation of the primitive man as he wonders how he can know whether the gods will look benignantly on this or that deed. How can he know for certain? Self-consciousness is there and obviously gives a philosophical quality to his reflection. Yet when we speak of philosophy we mean something else. The same can be said of belief; as the acceptance of otherness as such (that is, of the given), it is present in every thought and action that is not absolutely devoid of objectivity. Yet this only gives a religious, or, as it is more often put, a sober and serious character to any activity, practical or theoretical, social or individual; it is the first element of rationality, and as such present in every form of human experience worthy of the name; but that is not religion. In religion we have not only the acceptance of the given and of otherness as such; the given in religion must be given by an agent other than us, and this entails immediately the recognition not merely of otherness as such but of a definite Other. That Other to be an agent must be a definite subject and therefore a person. Just as in politics those who speak of 'mankind'

as the society to which they belong, do not say more but less than those who speak in the same way of a definite country; so in religion those who speak of the *divine* as the object of their belief do not say more but less than those who speak in the same way of a definite and well determined conception of God, for the personal attributes which determine God determine at the same time the thoughts and actions, the rights and duties of the believer.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CATHOLICISM AND ENGLISH LIBERALISM

AFTER writing on the various forms of modernism, Gentile in a few pages presented his conception of the absolute forms of mind. Being absolute they cannot be relative, even to each other, and therefore cannot have among themselves any relations of precedence. He has since developed this conception and given to it a systematic treatment, without, however, modifying it in any essential way.

Before we report this presentation of his theory, dated 1909, we will give first the conclusions to which he came from his direct and personal experience of practical life. From 1904 to 1907 he drew from his daily work as a teacher an enormous wealth of observations on the problem of education in particular, and on the life and development of the individual mind in general. These are as important as the controversies which cleared his mind on the nature of what outside of England is often termed liberalism, and of Catholicism, which when not contained within ecclesiastical precincts appears to us as *historical liberalism*. For it must be realized that English liberalism, like English protestantism, is entirely *sui generis*. There is one feature of the life of England which is sufficient to prove what we say and dispense us from a long and tiresome digression: everything that comes to light in the life of the Englishman organizes itself, takes shape, and entails form and ceremony, as it becomes *social*. Obviously England is far more individualistic than the so-called German countries; it is a land in which neither the Imperialism of the German type nor the Bolshevism of the Russian type could flourish, because individual dissatisfaction as it arises organizes, embodies, and disciplines itself, and can thus move rationally to action,

overthrowing what offends it. Let us, however, note here that the autonomy of the Englishman always and everywhere means sacrifice of individual independence to the reign of law and order, which is the condition *sine qua non* of the only true and fruitful liberty; that is, of true and positive autonomy. For what we have called individual independence is merely the absence of compulsion, which results in a negative liberty. Man is in that state not compelled to do this or to do that, but he is prevented by the inevitable conflict of single and independent wills from doing anything really valuable to others and to himself. The liberty of English Liberalism in its days of glory was completely social and historical; it meant ensuring to every man, through an historical organization entailing the acceptance of party discipline and constitutional laws, the free play of his activity directed towards his own ends as far as this was compatible with the welfare of the country. Indeed nothing could be more social and historical than this old English Liberalism, and no political counterpart of the Roman Catholic Church could be so perfect. Both the country for these great Liberals and the Church for intelligent Catholics mean the organic body which ensures to every member the best conditions possible for working towards his own ends, namely his private welfare and spiritual development in the one case, and his eternal salvation in the other. Thus the application of the law is in both cases rigid; and the rigidity is determined by the sacred character of the individual activity that requires the undivided strength of the country and of the Church.

On the Continent, however, Liberalism has a quite different character. It is less concrete, practical, and political, more abstract, theoretical, and anti-social. Thus whilst for practical reasons English liberals have developed the art of compromise, no less than the Jesuits, and appear to unintelligent foreigners as perfect hypocrites as the

Jesuits used to appear; the non-English liberals have developed an abstract individualism bound not only to appear but to act as an anti-social force. History stands witness to our statement. English Liberalism has brought into being the most perfect form of modern state which the world has yet seen; it has in consequence benefited not only England but the whole western world. As long as it was faithful to its own spirit, which was political with a religious earnestness, the country was greatly strengthened by its social force. Far from being anti-social and anti-historical, it brought to a nearly perfect equality the recognition of man's worth and more than human end, and the recognition of the body which is nothing but the positive and therefore historical organization of the social world, necessary so that man may attend to his private affairs, ensure his material welfare, and lead a righteous life. It gradually ceased to be such a social and historical force with the advent of materialism, which as it filtered through was bound to beget utilitarianism; and, gradually passing from social to personal utilitarianism, ended in an individualism as abstract as that of the Continent, and consequently entailed endless division in the party. Religious individualism is a social force that ensures the reign of law and liberty; whilst materialistic individualism is an anti-social force that entails the desire to ignore or escape the law because it mistakes material independence for concrete and historical liberty.

Thus when we find the Church opposed to Liberalism we must remember the distinction which has just been stated, as well as a fact which is symptomatic of what the Church and the Liberal state have in common. Catholicism leaves man perfectly free as long as his freedom is not destructive of the ecclesiastical whole or simply dangerous to its organic unity; Liberalism leaves man perfectly free as long as his freedom is not destructive of the political whole or merely dangerous to its organic unity. To give

one instance on each side, we may state that the Church professes indifference towards political thought and action, and at least theoretically should show no preference for this or that political tendency, whilst in practice it favours this or that party in one country and opposes the same in another country, according to the circumstances that make it a social force here and an anti-social force there. Liberalism advocates complete religious tolerance in theory and would allow interference only when a given creed proves to be an anti-social principle; but in practice it opposes any religion that is likely to secure pre-eminence and thus establish a historical and social organic body apt to oppose its religious supremacy to the political supremacy of the State, which the State must maintain. Each, in short, is tolerant of, and even professes to be indifferent to, all that does not endanger the unity of the social whole, which is its own historical embodiment; on the other hand, both cease to be tolerant when their life, respectively spiritual and political, enters a period of stagnation. Life means development and an increasing self-assertion; hence where it decays intolerance creeps in with the overgrowth of cumbersome party organization or of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; where it flourishes buoyantly it spontaneously determines its own discipline, which is nothing but rationality in action.

These things were not known to Gentile as they are to us; for one thing he lacked the intimate acquaintance with Catholicism and with England which alone can enable us to see in their self-organizing life anything rather than the negation of liberty, and in their historical individualism the very principle of law and liberty. Moreover he had been trained in the free-thinking nineteenth century and could not have all the profit of Croce's and his own reaction against the prejudices consequent upon the dogmatism of such free-thinking.

By profession he is a teacher. He started very early

indeed to teach as no one could except a man who adds to his natural gifts and scientific training the experience gathered through his own school days.

The mind is always developing, whether the man is old or young. Although the child's education is more important for study and preparation, adult education is still of great importance; and in fact education continues wherever there is the life that is the development of mind. This development must be as complete as possible, and Gentile is thus brought to condemn the education of all schools where art, religion, reflection, and common sense have no special place in the curriculum. 'Rational education' seemed to him most irrational, since it tended exclusively to the development of one aspect of the individual mind to the detriment of belief, imagination, feeling, and common sense. While still very young he became the champion of free and religious education; because to him the ideal training is that which develops the individual 'all round'; and the lack of religion at school means therefore a mutilation of the mind.

In 1907 he read a paper at the Congress held in Naples by the *Federazione fra gli insegnanti delle scuole medie* in which he provoked the hostility of the advocates of both the lay and the confessional schools. He wanted to re-introduce religion into the elementary school, and this was bound to rouse violent opposition from the anti-clericals. On the other hand he proposed that in the secondary schools the Catholic doctrine should disappear and some philosophic teaching take its place. Nothing could have shocked the Catholics more deeply. His proposal might well rouse a scandal. He was a product of the lay school and could not conceive of any other as a true school. Yet his observations and his sense of actual life in its practical as well as its spiritual aspect, compelled him to recognize the inferiority of this type of school, and the relative superiority of the confessional school. The state



liberal school might turn out men equipped with more knowledge, with more scientific methods, but the Catholic schools turned out *men*, and that to him was the object of school life. Out of a hundred boys attending the secondary schools a very few may turn out scientists, whereas all of them should turn out men. Obviously if Gentile had then known English schools he would have seen, as we have, the real affinity between them and the Catholic schools that he had in mind. We must, however, as we point out such affinity point out the difference also. The English school achieves its purpose from without, through the rationality of practical life and social contact; the Catholic from within, through the rationality of its belief.

As the considerations he brings forward in this paper give the practical ground of his speculative views on religion, it is worth while to analyse them; since they prepare the reader for what, clothed in technical terminology, might sound abstract in spite of its springing from concrete and actual life. He begins this paper by exposing the negativeness of the current notion of a lay school. It is generally held that any school which is not confessional is a lay school. This definition does not confer any character upon it. If the idea of it means no more than that, it is not worth defending. For if it is merely a school that has succeeded in getting rid of all religious and confessional character, it certainly cannot represent an advance. Such negativeness however was, according to him, due first of all to the poor idea people had of the religious school; and if a positive value was to be ascribed to the lay school it was necessary to find in it some of that which is essential to the religious mind and therefore to the religious school.

But the lay school is the product of the lay State. Usually when people speak of the lay State they merely mean a state divided from the Church; and as Church and religion are but too often equivalent, this generally means

a State indifferent to religion and without religion. All this implies that the State must act as if religion did not exist, as if independently of the State the value of religion did not exist. And religion is indeed Church, cultus, social institution, individuals; but it is all that only as far as it is first of all religion. Church, cultus, clergy, all imply a creed, a teaching, above all a definite assertion of the divine. Thus in order to deny recognition to religion the State must refuse to recognize the divine outside its own self, that is, it must refuse to admit an assertion of any divine authority independent of the State.

'The divine, however, is absolute or unconditioned, for everyone who is able to affirm it either as reality or as an aspiration, as an ideal (granted that reality could be considered as not one and the same thing as the ideal). It is the truth which is imperishable and therefore binds all minds, overcoming them inevitably. It is the duty that stands over man, peremptory and categorical, blocking all the loopholes of the casuist, forbidding all the softness of sentimentality. It is the law of thought and of life, which must have their own law, since nothing is lawless either in life or in thought. The divine is consequently that which must be, that which has a value; in short, it is value. A State without religion is therefore monstrous.'<sup>1</sup>

After this Gentile assumes unawares the garb of the apologists, without however being altogether impeded by it. His imperturbable logic compelled him to assert, all through, principles which are the condemnation of any non-confessional school. Yet he had prepared to speak at the congress for the precise purpose of enforcing and justifying the rights and claiming the superiority of the lay school. When he had started writing his paper, 'I had not even suspected', he said, 'that it might be discussed whether the subject of the debate should be that our school should be a lay school. That it should be so, seemed to me implied by the very motion laid before the Congress, and implicitly agreed upon'. It was indeed a

<sup>1</sup> Gentile, *Educazione e Scuola Laica*, Valecchi, Florence, 1921, p. 93.

matter quite beyond question then in Italy, but it was to be gradually questioned henceforth. Gentile stands on the platform of this congress as the apologist of the lay school, the lay state, lay science. His conviction seems to have been very strong. Stronger, however, was his sense of life and logic, and we cannot but feel with the great majority of his colleagues when they protested against what they called an abuse of logic. They accused him of being too logical; and he remarked that this meant he had been illogical. In a certain sense, but not in the sense he meant, he might have been truly so described. After having written, as we have seen, that the apologist's arguments have no value, since it is impossible for any work to be critical and apologetical at the same time, he appeared in that congress as the apologist and the critic of lay State and school. Thus even if there was not an intrinsic difference of weight between his argument in defence of the lay school and his argument in favour of religious education, the critic should set aside as devoid of critical and philosophical significance the brilliancy and cleverness of the former, and hold fast to the latter as being the consequence of his observation of concrete life forcing him, out of logical necessity, into this emphatic defence of faith. For this paper in the end was but the proclamation of the impossibility of depriving education and human life as a whole of its spiritual ground.

Is it possible that the state, denying the divine outside its own self, should deny it also in itself and everywhere? It may do so in words; but then the State has never been a mere matter of words. It is as an ethical activity that it is real. The State does not therefore speak about itself; it asserts itself through the endless process of its own realization. Such process implies that it is always striving towards what it ought to be, that is to say towards itself as a value, as something regulative, as something absolute and divine. And the conclusion must be that the State,

secular as it may try to be by rejecting religion, cannot succeed in emptying itself of an intrinsic religiousness. Moreover, men may be more or less conscious of the fact, but such religiousness is really the first cause of the negation or expulsion of the other forms of religion; which, with the development of the form inherent in the State, have become gradually alien, artificial, and superfluous, an impediment and a cause of harm to the State. Gentile lays great stress on the point. Man can only deny recognition to a given form of religion when another is asserting itself in him; strictly speaking the assertion is not consequent upon the negation; it is the negation that follows upon the assertion. And as Gentile holds that scholasticism, being philosophy even when it appeared under the garb of theology, was just as free as any other school of philosophy; so he now goes on to show that the State was always and everywhere lay. No real State, even the so-called non-lay or confessional State, accepts a creed passively; for it makes its own. Obviously enough if it did not, and yet compelled citizens to accept it, as is the wont of any confessional State, it would not be a confessional State. The difference between lay and confessional States is purely empirical. Through empirical contingencies the State assumes in different times different forms; and it can be said that such forms represent in their variety a progress towards forms more and more in keeping with the speculative notion of religious freedom.<sup>1</sup> A school must be lay because by nature it is lay. Since it is bent on the development of mind, it is bound to be free—*Ubi spiritus ibi libertas*. But then wherever school life has really meant education, the school *has* been free, more or less free, not altogether free, but always free. If the school had not always been free, that is to say lay, and was not so by nature, the congress in which the paper was delivered would have been asking something irrational.

<sup>1</sup> Gentile, op. cit., p. 86.

To be desired, the lay character must be a character essential to the nature of a school. The same will apply to the State.

In history, the words church or confession are equivalent to religion; not so however in philosophy. Any school in which religion is taught and dominates teachers and pupils as a form of religion historically determined, that is to say, as a positive religion, is obviously a confessional school. On the other hand, religiousness is not necessarily absent from schools lacking such teaching and domination, 'if it be true that religiousness can subsist in a mind that does not accept any positive religion, any kind of true and proper religion'.<sup>1</sup> Whatever his conviction as an apologist of the lay school, it is obvious from these last words that his natural repugnance to vague and abstract things compelled him to look askance on a religiousness that, devoid of definite and historical form, could hardly be considered true and proper religion in the concrete world of life which is history, i.e., experience. He was defining the nature of the confessional school because he thought that 'if our lay school is to represent an advance upon the confessional school, we must, in order to know what ours ought to be, know first of all what the other is. And to know what confessional religiousness is, we must roughly know what religiousness is'.

Religion is that particular form of knowledge, or assertion, of the Absolute (Being, Thought, Truth, Good, &c.) which, taking this Absolute as opposed and external to the subject who knows and asserts it, prevents every rational mediation between them. This form of knowledge cannot reach the discursiveness of thought, where the opposition should be overcome, and thus religion gives up the solution of this opposition (a solution necessary to the moral and speculative life of the spirit) and lets it rest with that which stands over against the subject.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

Consequently religion is knowledge, irrational and mythical knowledge of the Absolute. It is irrational because the Absolute is conceived as beyond thought and therefore unknowable, mythical because it is conceived as determined under the forms of sense-knowledge, that is, in time and space.<sup>1</sup> The views of which this is a summary belong to the period which preceded his essays on Modernism; they present a setback in respect of those which have been considered above; and the whole passage is an unfortunate medley in which Vico's and Hegel's views are uncritically mixed. It is reported here merely in order to show that his insisting on Catholic dogmatic teaching in the elementary schools whilst he considered a sort of philosophical teaching of religion in the secondary schools, and even spoke of a philosophical faith is no more confusing than his views on the nature of religion could be at the time.

Affirmation of the Absolute means affirmation of its unknowableness; that is, of the impossibility of uniting the Absolute with the human spirit; and strictly speaking such should be the religious content of religion, if this could be found pure of art and philosophy. We know, however, that in life it is on the contrary never pure, and that we have rational mediation and artistic expression whenever and wherever man has had a creed. This affirmation of the Absolute, Gentile goes on to insist, is not to be considered one among many in the life of thought: it is central and fundamental because the Absolute—whether we believe that we know it or not—is the centre and ground of thought. Hence one of the most important characters of religious activity, which must dominate, centralize, and unify; hence the tendency of such an activity to select, value, and criticize. Hence again the intolerance of the religious mind, its weakness and strength, its negativeness and positiveness. The Absolute is one by

<sup>1</sup> Gentile, *op. cit.*, *passim* pp. 87–8.

definition. Two absolutes would limit and condition each other, and both would cease to be absolute. Therefore any affirmation of the Absolute implies exclusion of any other affirmation of the Absolute, however slight the difference of form might be.

If only one object of thought is Absolute, all the other objects of thought are conditioned by that one. All our spiritual life revolves on that axis; and since there is but one axis, whatever does not revolve upon it does not live the life of the spirit. An end beyond our will, a principle allowing us to direct our knowledge beyond our intelligence; that is religion.

Descending from philosophy to history we meet no longer with religion but with religions. There is a great number of positive religions, and each is exclusive of all the others. As for the confessional school, it is that in which minds are formed according to a given positive religion, to conceive life from a particular point of view incompatible with any other conception of life that would arise from a different point of view. School life ought to promote the unification of minds, freeing them from individual differences and lifting them to the pure air of science and towards the universal good. The confessional school does the contrary, for it invests the young soul with a new hardness; to the differences anterior to school it adds new differences, less eradicable because more systematic. In short to the pupils the whole of mankind gradually comes to appear cut in two, the elect and the reprobate. Instead of promoting friendship it promotes division, instead of collaboration, intolerance for all the content of thought, that is, for all the product of thought which can be unified, and which is therefore the living part of thought.

This is not however the most serious defect of confessional education. As a matter of fact philosophical or political dogmatism is just as intolerant. A greater drawback is the reluctance of such educational institutions to

allow free play to the development of scientific thought and to bring the mind to that sense of self-mastery, of autonomy, of personal responsibility, intellectual as well as moral, that should be the highest aim of education. The religious spirit is *from this point of view 'anti-civic'* because it is *'anti-ethical', and in general anti-spiritual*.<sup>1</sup> From this point of view the confessional school is no school; it is the negation of a school.<sup>2</sup> These are the main arguments used by Gentile in his apology for the lay school, which, as he was the first to note, turned out to be an indictment against the confessional school. When he passed on to expounding the positive value in the latter a corresponding change took place, and he proceeded to the strongest indictment against non-confessional school and life.

<sup>1</sup> The italics are not G.G.'s.

<sup>2</sup> Gentile, op. cit., *passim* pp. 90-4.



## CHAPTER XX

### FAITH AS THE DOMINANT NOTE OF LIFE

By branding religion as the negation of autonomy, and therefore as the negation of ethics, of civic life, and spiritual life as a whole, Gentile was giving the last touch to the apologetic side of his paper. He was, moreover, rightly and emphatically claiming the necessity of true liberty for school, science, and spiritual life as a whole. When he had thus satisfied his conscience as a convinced supporter of the lay State and the lay school, the powerful grip he always takes of actual life determined the rest of his speech. Daily experience had taught him that the confessional school has many advantages over other schools; the greatest being the faith which it inculcates and makes the centre of the soul's life.

The confessional school has a conception of the essential end of the spirit, and upon this end it brings to bear all its work. It knows where it is going and it does not waste its energy by the way. No school can boast a better point of vantage. Only when it has a high and powerful ideal, to which it can turn for inspiration, illumination, and guidance in all questions of curriculum or method can a school be fully conscious of its purpose. It is a fact that clericals in Italy had been able to have efficient schools, adapted to form souls, concentrating all their means upon the end that was most important for them, whilst the liberals had failed to have an efficient school of their own. School for Gentile means *spiritus in fieri*—we have already noted that for him education extends all through life, so that human life itself is *spiritus in fieri*—hence there can be no school where there is no liberty, but neither where there is no conception of Mind and of the whole life that manifests itself in the individual mind. The first principle of any school is the first principle of every conscious mind, of

every mind which knows (as far as it is able to know it) its own value and the part that it has to play in this world: it is the conception of the Absolute, of that which is the basis of everything.<sup>1</sup>

In any confessional school this general and central view rules over all the teaching. It is a spiritual light, a spiritual warmth, that illuminates and blends into a strong and consistent organism all the efforts of the young souls striving towards a unique form of truth and justice. In a word, it is the soul of all their studies.

The members of that congress had a better scientific equipment than those who taught in the Catholic schools; but theirs was mostly the science of the specialist and of the grammarian, it was the erudition of the *homo unius libri* who may be a scholar and not be a man. The zeal of the specialist had not been exclusively harmful. 'For the entireness of man's spiritual forces must not be preserved at the cost of damaging the seriousness, the depth, the progress of scientific work.'<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the result of a too early specialization in scientific education is often scepticism and the decay of all the energies of the soul. The master creates the pupil in his own image; and these specialists can promote the love of study, they may even arouse their pupils' eagerness for this or that kind of study; but it does not follow that they can make *men*. They are not necessarily men themselves. It is impossible for them to kindle passions that they do not feel. How can they arouse in their pupils the desire to understand life and oneself in life when they have stifled it in their own souls, sinking themselves and the whole of life gradually in the discussion of some small problem of grammar or philology? How can they create faith if they have none? And yet even the specialist of a problem of grammar cannot live with his whole life shut up in that problem. He is bound

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *Educazione e Scuola Laica*, Valecchi, 1921, Florence, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

to move as a man even in the schoolroom, in his family, in society, and in the world. What if a pupil asks him for an explanation, not of this or that life, but of life? He can of course point to history if he is asked for an explanation of this or that duty, but the question that any educator should be able to answer is 'What is duty?' And to this history has no answer; only faith can meet such a question. 'All considerations must give way to this one', writes Gentile; 'we are teachers, our art is the making of souls.' And we know already that for him only faith gives shape to a soul. 'The soul which has faith, whatever the belief, is shaped and moulded by it; in such a way that nothing happens to it except in conformity with such faith.'

After all this Gentile tried in vain to reconcile what he had said of the excellence of the lay school with his emphatic proclamation of the superiority of the confessional school. His attempt made the contrast worse. For to be consistent he voted against the motion that the whole elementary school system should pass into the hands of lay men or women; and repeatedly demanded the introduction of definite religious teaching into these elementary schools. On the other hand, secondary schools were to have philosophical religious teaching; the teachers imparting philosophical faith. He could not have done much worse in the way of conciliation. In the discussion that followed he kept on insisting that the confessional school had something that their State schools lacked: 'It was a faith; that is the soul of the whole school, the soul of the master's and pupil's soul.' The liberal Italian school, from the university to the elementary school or even infant school, lacked that soul. The two horns of the dilemma were emphasized in that paper by Gentile, as they were presented to him by the most realistic and positive observation of life. Their antithesis, however, was not overcome there, as we have said, and it could not be. He has himself written that all moral problems arise in the

empirical world, but that they cannot be solved there. We should like to say that this is not only the case with moral problems but with all practical problems. There he had before him the characteristics that made a school a lay school, and those that made it a confessional school. The former summing up in two words scientific truth as the goal, liberty as the means; the latter opposing eternal truth as a magnetic pole, to the consciousness of the man of faith as a compass. It was logically inevitable that he should imagine for the higher school a third type, a philosophical school, with a mediated and therefore rational faith that would endow it with the soul that alone can make it a living organism, and yet respect or even enforce the autonomy essential to scientific training and research. He foresaw all the difficulties and did his best to meet them. In spite of his efforts he could only make things worse by suggesting that each secondary school should try to select its teachers in a way that should ensure to single schools, at least approximately, unity in philosophical faith, so as to prevent the diversity of beliefs amongst the staff from breeding scepticism among students. To any one used to the Gentile of later years and familiar with his speculative works, his attitude here seems almost comic. His own view of the State school could have been stated quite briefly: it was no school at all. Abstracting from life, as it did, it was abstract. As to the confessional school, it had defects repugnant to the very notion of a school, but it was a school, because it hid under the acceptance of a given faith which enabled it to be truly educative some sparks of that liberty, or lay character, without which it also would not have been a school. The philosophical faith which he propounded for the secondary schools could not have done the same service as the creed it was meant to supplant. It is its immediateness which invests belief with all the virtue that he had ascribed to it. Any mediated conception would not offer at all the same starting-point

for action and thought. Can it not be held that action and thinking, life in short, is mediation? and that the ground of all mediation is immediate and must be immediate? The religious immediate is absolute, it is a datum in the full sense of the term. Going back to what we have reported of Gentile, it will not be difficult to see that the function which he ascribes to religion is the consequence of this givenness and immediateness. How then could he think of a philosophical, rational and therefore mediated faith, performing the same task?

The divine is absolute and unconditioned; it is the truth that is imperishable and *therefore binds* all minds, dominating them *inevitably*; it is the duty that stands over man, peremptory and categorical. To be binding it must be unalterable. Such was the conclusion to which daily observation had brought Gentile; and personal experience fully supports his teaching on this point. A kind of steely hardness, or rather stony impenetrability, must be the characteristic of the object of faith. Since the recognition of such an object is the essence of law, the reality of law is subjective, it is his own act of recognition that binds man; but on the other hand, if it be granted that the object of such recognition must be absolute and unalterable, its nature cannot be dependent on the recognition of each believer. As Gentile has often said that political citizenship is binding only as far as each man is conscious of being the citizen of a definite state, so we may say that true and proper religion cannot be met with except in positive churches. Religiousness goes hand in hand with humanitarianism, sharing as it does the vagueness of it; duties to mankind mean duties to nobody, and the worship of an indefinite notion means a worship which cannot be binding.

Religion is a particular form of theoretical life, but it is also a particular form of action. It is an affirmation of the Absolute, considered as opposed to the subject in such

a way that every rational mediation, that is to say, every apprehension of it under the form of discursive thought, is essentially not religious. Thus the object is immediate reason. This immediateness is so essential to religion that 'divine' and 'unknowable' are equivalent. Such an unknowable, immediate object is the law of our life as far as it is immediate. Its affirmation is not an affirmation among other affirmations; it is central and fundamental. It is the ground of thought, and determines the objectivity in science which empirical philosophy has for so long believed to be dependent on sense-knowledge. The canon of our theoretical and practical activity is belief in the reality of the unknown. That Absolute, stony, steely Absolute is the one and inflexible standard of true knowledge and good deeds.

An end beyond our will, a principle allowing us to direct our knowledge beyond our very intelligence, that is what religion provides for man, as far as each of us sees objective reality through his own recognition of it. Gentile, pointing to the disadvantage of the confessional school, had emphasized the intolerance and harshness which it fosters in its pupils as a result of its dividing men into elect and reprobate, and laid great stress on its reluctance to give full scope to the autonomy of scientific research, to which the regulative ideal of scientific truth and the character of personal responsibility are essential. His object was to point out the necessity of having both law and liberty at school and in life at large. When he wrote that the religious spirit is *anti-civic, anti-ethical, and in general anti-spiritual* in consequence of its intolerance and reluctance to grant the autonomy which is essential to the life of mind, he was giving us a dark but true picture of what happens to spiritual life when one of the forms essential to it prevails to the extent of maiming the others. He had just done the same when speaking of the lay school; he expounded the way in which its abstract liberalism had

compelled human life to escape from it or wither away. Undoubtedly more experience was still required to enable him to realize, as he did twelve years later in his *Logic*, the necessity of immediacy in all mediation, to satisfy, as he did there, the claim of objectivity so emphatically expressed by Hegel, and to conceive the way in which life articulates itself between law and liberty.

When religion provides man with a conception of the essential end of the spirit, the believer organizes his life in relation to such an end, making it an organic whole with a tone, colour, and rhythm that are absolutely denied to the man whose life lacks such a central idea and soul. For the soul is the unifying force of our empirical life, and the unity is lacking where there is no axis, no magnetic pole or fundamental basis of thought. Man, going from this to that problem, from this to that purpose, successively limits his personality to this or that problem, to this or that purpose. His subjectivity, to be human, to be spiritual, must be made universal and objectified. This being the case his mind must obviously be capable, in its own nature as mind, of objectifying itself and reaching universality, whether he is educated or not. That is why St. Augustine is no nearer to this universality than St. Agnes, or St. Thomas than St. Francis of Assisi. Contemplation, speculation, action must be all of them thought, all of them action. And thought, understood as the activity characteristic of humanity, is a constant element present wherever a subject becomes conscious of an Absolute transcending his own real and actual self, whatever be the stage of development reached by mind either in an individual or in a whole civilization.

If schools and all teaching bodies must have a general and central view ruling over the teaching and education they impart, it is obvious that their religion must, like all spiritual reality, have a concrete form, an expression, an organization that can be nothing but the historical

embodiment of a given creed. It could not otherwise impart scientific knowledge, illuminated by a spiritual light and vivified by a spiritual warmth, capable of blending into a strong and consistent organism all the efforts of the youthful souls, capable of directing them towards a unique form of truth and justice. That historical and positive character of the belief is necessary so that the child, as he grows up, may, when he asks the great questions: 'what is life?' 'what is God?' receive the very same answers on the different intellectual levels of the infant school, the elementary school, the secondary school, and the higher school, right up to the university. For if the people who are to answer him are *teachers* in the lofty sense of the word, and if their art is really the making of souls, it is impossible that they should have different views as to the nature of the Absolute, the conception of which is to determine their answers. If they have different views, they will give him diverging directions and he will enter life a sceptic unable to hold by any faith because both his veneration for his masters and his trust in learning will prevent him from making up his mind. Without any view, any knowledge, of the Absolute, he will enter life and face its storms and darkness without a compass, without even suspecting that there may be a magnetic pole. Of this fact Gentile's daily experience offered him abundant demonstration, and that he did not let it pass unheeded is clear enough from what has been said above. The whole of his late work is mainly the speculative elaboration of these conclusions, and of a few others also drawn from his personal experience of the life of individual minds.



## CHAPTER XXI

### LIBERTY AND LAW SPRING FROM BELIEF

GENTILE's most recent publication on the subject of religion does not present any important alteration of his doctrine.<sup>1</sup> He is brought in the end to the same view of life as a whole. Man overcomes instinct as soon as he becomes aware of what surrounds him, because he becomes *ipso facto* conscious of what he ought to do in this surrounding world; and he ceases to be dominated by the blind laws of his material and mechanical life. He looks round upon the external world, at what is displayed in his intuition of time and space, and he comes to know the immutable laws of the physical world, which he must know if he is to adjust to such laws those of his activities which are directed to the satisfaction of his needs. He turns to the inner world which he feels developing in his heart and intellect with the rapid succession of feelings, ideas, desires, intentions, and decisions; and it is like the picture of a second nature. It has its own laws to which man is bound to conform. Even in the very act of giving life to a thought or act, of which he feels the full value, because he is conscious of performing it freely on his own absolute initiative, he sees the movement of his soul no longer as an act but as a fact. As such he sees it taking place in the infinite web of reality which is what it is, beyond our power to alter it. We may know the whole or a greater or smaller part, but it is always the same. The very fact that we may know it as altogether determined, as a truth still to be discovered, as a vein of gold buried in the deepest stratum of the earth, and as yet neither known nor suspected by any man, implies that it is determined in itself. Nature appears to us beyond the reach of our power; but

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Gentile, 'Il problema religioso in Italia', an article in *Educazione Fascista*, Jan. 1927.

what of our spiritual life? In the act in which it comes to realize itself we believe that we are the masters of its course and the authors of it; and as soon as it faces us as a given moment, a concrete form, an idea, a system, an action, a sorrow, a joy, as any content whatever of our consciousness to which our soul may turn and say 'here is my life and my world', that life is swallowed up, sinking from the present to the past, the irrevocable past which has ceased to belong to us, and recedes and confronts us as death confronts life. To know is to objectify, even if it is our own act that we are knowing.

The torment of man is just that tragedy of his present. The present, in which he feels the throb of his own life, in which is concentrated everything to which the mind turns as to the well and spring of everything that makes life valuable or that makes the comfort of it, and renders it lovable or sufferable, that elusive present runs inexorably into the past. In the immense limbo of the past, full of the things in which thought mirrors itself, the present sinks and man sees himself fixed and already belonging to the reality which *is* and which he may know just as it is in perfect resignation. Such is the tragedy of life, the ceaseless decline of everything that lives, the gradual sinking of everything alive into death. What has happened has happened, and whatever we can think of it, it simply has already happened; whatever has been is an antecedent of our actual activity, hence a limit and a condition of it. Thus, even when a powerful energy breaks out of us and seems to free us from our limited nature and make us an agent in the life which alone is immortal, and we recognize that energy as greater than we are, enabling us to create a work which will bring more good and an increase of that reality which *is* independently of us, confronting us and threatening to overwhelm us with its immense weight—even then, when we look at that work as it arises and faces us in its splendour, it stupefies us and we begin to suspect

and very soon to feel sure that we are not the authors of it. We feel very strongly that a mysterious power has used us as an instrument for the creation of a superhuman work, and that that mysterious power must have existed before us and consequently dominated our being. The law of such power is acknowledged by any man who is not a fool and who recognizes the seriousness of life.

In this recent paper Gentile identifies with the recognition of the divine the seriousness of the man who knows full well that he can create nothing, not even a blade of grass or a grain of salt; the seriousness which makes him thoughtful, sets a value on every single action, word, or thought, and confronts him with death and mystery, making him realize his impotence and nothingness. For when man feels that everything is outside him and nothing in him, he lives religiously. And since man, to avoid such an attitude, must avoid thinking and living, the conclusion must be that he is religious by nature, and that religion is consequently autonomous and eternal.

To think is to face God. And the more man thinks, the nearer he is to God who is all, confronting man who is nothing. And this should be enough to prove that man cannot organize his own spiritual life without religion. *Therefore we need religion*; but man's nature has an invincible repugnance to such annihilation. It is true that he is bound to deny his own reality in the presence of the infinite, but it is no less true that religion itself is the fulfilment of his own reality all through the development of its dogma and cultus. It is man indeed that takes dogma as material for an endless process of development and interpretation, all due to his own work, through which religion is what it is and has a history wherein are interwoven human work, human thought, and human struggles. The embodiment of religion is throughout the work of man. Not only in its liturgical forms but also in sacred architecture, sculpture, pictures, music, and poetry man

exercises his original and creative power in the very act of giving life and body to religion.

This marvellous creativeness of art has been explained as due to divine inspiration, and the artist considered as an instrument in the hands of God. Even if this were accepted as the truth about genius, the fact would remain that, however man may fix his eyes on what appears to him not to be his own work, in the act of doing so he cannot help judging. For even if he does forbear from judging the object of his thought, he cannot avoid judging his own thought. He has to value it as true thought, that cannot be mistaken for any of the infinite number of thoughts that would be false. He cannot avoid feeling it as his own, as the one he chooses, distinguishing it from error and asserting it. Again, he cannot reject it or treat it indifferently as one of the many thoughts that others might think. In such discrimination, choice, opposition to error, affirmation, appropriation, the subject realizes himself as the ground of truth, as free activity which is neither determined nor conditioned by anything outside it. *Est Deus in nobis*; and He speaks through our mouth. *True, but this could not even be thought if we were not there beside Him and listening to His voice, and judging true that intuition owing to which we think that He is in us and speaks in us.* Without liberty not only would the activity through which God reveals and presents Himself to us fail to be ours; but the act through which we recognize this transcendent revelation and presentation would not be our act.

In short, God is all to us; yet this has no meaning unless we are able to think it. And with this necessity of his freedom, which has to be unquestionable fact if he is to be free, man, who is nothing in presence of God, asserts himself as being *all*, as an activity infinite, unconditioned, free. Religion itself, becoming the thought of man, develops historically; it casts off the immobility of the purely objective reality of God *qui ab aeterno stat*, unchange-

able Being, Thought, and Will; unchangeable because *a priori* and immediately perfect. Thus subjective faith develops in the heart of man. And through this faith all things great and small are done. But it is also owing to this faith that the men who feel most in need of religion are the first to submit it to criticism. They throw themselves upon God and rest for a while in Him, and then they are overtaken by melancholy and anguish in their heart; with belief doubt is born, with the Church is born heresy, with religion philosophy. Alternate vicissitudes swing man from the consciousness of God to self-consciousness, from self-consciousness to the consciousness of God; he passes to and fro from the one to the other. If on the one hand the necessity of religion appears unquestionable, on the other hand liberty as self-consciousness is no less necessary. God and thought are the two magnetic poles of life, equally necessary and equally essential; but they are opposed and appear contradictory terms. Is it man who thinks of God? Or God who thinks of man? Neither one nor the other can offer full and adequate satisfaction to the twofold need of the human mind, which feels at the same time, first *that it must be free* and secondly *that it cannot move in vacuo*.

What appears as two needs is in reality one single need. For what is needed is the belief in an objective, absolute, and divine Reality; and it is to that end that liberty is required so that man may give his adhesion and form his judgement, both of which would be impossible without the free activity of thought. And, in fact, the whole history of our religion is filled with the struggles caused *by the necessity of upholding human liberty so that man may believe in the objective infinity of God and assert His reality*.

God must be all; but man must be something in order to be that something which it is necessary that he should be. Thought must be always held in suspicion, and yet invited, and stimulated, in order that it may recognize truth. This is the appearance of contradiction inherent in religious

thought. It is so essential to it that the solution cannot be the suppression of either term (since the fall of the one involves that of the other), neither can it be their unification in one comprehensive term, that could assign to each of them its own realm; such a partition and juxtaposition is repugnant to their nature, according to which one implies the other, since it is impossible to think without thinking of God, and no less impossible to believe in God without thinking. And still less is it possible to resolve their opposition into a static and lasting unity. Their only unification is that of their eternal struggle in thought. For thought lives ALWAYS in this struggle; it turns towards God and longs to rest there (*cupio dissolvi*) but reaches Him only to turn back towards itself, raising itself and soaring from stage to stage, higher and higher, knowing no pause, a developing unity, a movement of eternal self-realization, a living unity, which to be living must be anxious, for evermore dissatisfied with itself. No other solution is possible.

Gentile in 1927 gives thus a full speculative value to his empirical observation of 1907, and it is superfluous to point to the new relation of philosophy and religion there indicated. Philosophy and religion are both the apprehension of the universal; and in consequence they are both *lux intellectus et sapientia vitae*. But they are not successive historical stages; they are co-eternal and in fact even in history are not to be found one without the other. No philosophy could flourish without dogmatic religious belief in eternal truth. No religion could flourish and be intelligible to man without his own reflection upon his religious belief, and that reflection is self-consciousness and philosophy. Modern philosophy may acknowledge that the problem has moved considerably under the hands of Gentile; and that the solution towards which it has moved is far more true to life than that of Hegel; although it is a fact that the latter's contribution is one of the circumstances which made Gentile's possible.

## CHAPTER XXII

### BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE

GENTILE's theory of Mind may now be definitely stated; but we should point out before we begin the two aspects of that theory which are most liable to criticism. First he speaks at length of religion as knowledge of the Unknown and Unknowable, yet he sets forth as he expounds its nature perhaps not all but much that is characteristic of belief and distinguishes it from knowledge. The problem of their distinction is nevertheless simply overlooked; consequently much is badly worded and not as clearly thought out as it would have been had he previously established that distinction. The best instance of loose wording is precisely this knowledge of the Unknown and Unknowable. Nothing is less Gentilian than this contradiction in terms, which points obviously to careless thinking. This weakness of thought and style must be due to his overlooking the distinction between belief and knowledge; and the nature of religion and of its relation to philosophy is thereby bereft of the treatment it would otherwise have received. Secondly, when he speaks of *each conscious being as consciousness of the universe* it should not be understood in the pantheistic sense of the individual consciousness, being a manifestation of the consciousness of the universe. Spinoza could understand it in that sense, but not so Gentile. The former's conception of reality makes the first principle objective, owing to his naturalistic and mathematical ground; the latter's conception of reality makes the ground of it subjective, namely the pure act, or in plain language, God. It is therefore obvious that nature, as the world of matter, is not the object of Gentile's speculation; and also that as far as it is so, *qua* object of knowledge opposed to man *qua* subject, it is the manifestation of the transcendental Self; and that man as subject, far from being an emana-

tion or a manifestation of that material world, is in relation to it the collaborator of God. All this means, for we must make the point absolutely clear and simple, that the world of matter as object and man as subject have both as their ground the transcendental Self; but that man as conscious subject is in the historical world of experience the one though necessarily imperfect embodiment of the transcendental Self, whereas matter, or the universe understood as the world of nature, is in that same experience the negation of the spirit, what is essentially not Spirit, in short the scientific not-self.

We do not mean to say that so important and so Christian a revolution is due to Gentile alone. Orthodox churchmen like St. Ignatius of Loyola, Fonseca, and Molina, with all their French followers, such as Pascal (though he would be horrified to find himself in such company); and heretics like Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, and Rousseau, have all contributed with the secular and technical philosophy of four centuries towards it. On the other hand, since this is an established fact, modern idealism cannot be blamed for the philosophical errors and theological heresies which should be ascribed to Bruno, Spinoza, and Rousseau. Pantheism is the result of two fundamental errors: first, that of taking matter, which is by definition not spirit, into conscious reality, that is into spirit; and secondly, that of considering matter as the ground or first principle of man and the world. The first is due to the transference of the religious character of the relation between man and God, to the relation between man and nature; the second to the introduction of spiritualist and idealist tendencies, entailing a synthetic and dynamic character, into a philosophy which remains in its fundamental position scientific, and so requires the rigorous preservation of its analytic and static character. The scientific position, blending with spiritualistic and therefore synthetic tendencies, gives mysticism in religion,



that is, the absorption of the subject into the object. The same position and tendencies lead in philosophy to Pantheism, that is, to the attribution of all that is characteristic of the subject to what is essentially object, i.e. to what must be passive in the process of knowledge.

It should now be perfectly clear that Pantheism is essentially incompatible with idealism. We can only add that empirical or subjective idealism leads to Pelagianism and utilitarianism just as inevitably as abstract rationalism and materialism do; but that transcendental idealism cannot lead either to the Pelagian heresy or to the philosophical mediocrity of the Utilitarian school. The reason is simple. Just as it insists on the traditional orthodox view that the individual in his quality of single consciousness is the historical embodiment of the Spirit, and thereby avoids every form of emanationism and pantheism; so on the other hand it stresses its own but no less orthodox theory that man taken as purely empirical and abstracted from his surroundings has no rationality, hence no universal value, and above all no rights. Man having no duties to what transcends him, and consequently none to mankind, could not attain the transcendental, i.e. universal, value which alone justifies the claim of autonomy. It is only the reality of the transcendental, which is by definition outside and inside him, that justifies his looking into himself in order to find there his supreme end, as well as the contingent end that suffices to make every single human act a rational act. The transcendental immanence of the divine, with the explicit recognition it calls for, is in short the ground of all human right and duties.

Making ultimate reality Mind, Spirit, and Subject, Idealism stresses the fact that the ground of any analysis and especially of the dualism between mind and matter, subject and object, is the spiritual synthesis, which, however, requires and projects the analysis, distinction, and dualism, necessary to its own life. As long as it remains

faithful to this, its fundamental tenet, and keeps strictly to the world of human experience, that is, to history, transcendental Idealism moves on the safest ground, because it moves safely between the foggy and confusing theories of emanation and pantheism on the one hand, and on the other the abstract, atomistic, and therefore materialistic individualism that ends inevitably in Pelagianism and Utilitarianism. The distinction springs from the unity, and the ensuing dualism implies the unity, which finds in this dualism the articulation necessary to its own dialectical life.

In the very first sentence of the very first statement of his doctrine Gentile shakes off the Hegelian and Crocian view of the nature of religion, and its relation to philosophy. 'The three absolute forms or moments of mind are Art, Religion, and Philosophy; they are constitutive of mind, which is inseparable from them. The first is the assertion of the subject, the second that of the object, and the third is their synthesis.'

These forms being absolute, relativity of any kind is out of the question. The opposition of the relative to the absolute—of religions to Religion—belongs to historical reality; it is not therefore intrinsic but extrinsic to absolute reality, by which it is determined as the concrete manifestation of the latter. The relative mind—individual self which is both empirical and transcendental—does not, strictly speaking, belong to the world of philosophy, which is absolute reality. It is, however, the same viewed from an historical point of view, which is the only one that experience may offer us.

Mind is consciousness, synthesis of subject and object, and eternally distinguishes the terms that it eternally unifies. It is an identity, a self-consciousness which, however, must be first of all consciousness, and therefore *ipso actu* distinguishes itself into two terms, subject and object. Thus in our historical world man cannot be

conscious of the not-self without being always conscious of himself. How could he know that he knows a tree to be on the lawn if he was not aware of himself knowing it? The self and the not-self, thus distinguished and opposed in man's act of knowledge, meet in the Self that through its various determinations remains the principle of the unity in which each conscious being, as far as he transcends himself, is one with the universe, or rather is the consciousness of the universe.—We should prefer the less lyrical statement that: each conscious being, as far as he transcends himself identifies his own self with the Self; and thus realizes himself as historical consciousness, i.e. determination in time and space, of what otherwise has no individuality and therefore transcends historical reality.

The Spirit, Mind, or transcendental Self is therefore not the synthesis of two opposites come into being as such; for these opposites spring from the fundamental unity of the Self that, being Spirit, is essentially subject. We should not, however, confuse this absolute Self, principle of the dualism self and not-self as well as of their unity, with the self that, being the opposite of the not-self, is essentially relative. The absolute Self is the One, the unity of the still undivided two terms, the Whole whose universal life is felt throbbing by each of us in the rhythm of his own consciousness. In the light of this statement it is difficult to understand how it can be said that according to Gentile each man through his own act of knowing creates his object in a metaphysical sense.

The three forms or moments of Mind are the assertion of the subject, of the object, and of their synthesis; but it is only through a transcendental analysis that they can be so distinguished; for their synthesis is *a priori*. It is impossible to abstract from the rest the pure object or the pure subject, just as it is impossible to clutch the popular myth of a purely practical life; because they are transcendental, these forms or moments of Mind can only be

found together and never pure of each other. Hence religion, art, and philosophy cannot exist separately; they realize themselves in the Unity of Mind, and in the relative unity of each individual mind.

In consequence it is impossible to speak of one of them being prior in time, that is, historically prior to the other two, or of two being prior to the third. Their order, Gentile insists, can only be logical; moreover no temporal succession could be ascribed to the object of philosophy, seeing that this can only be eternal reality. In temporal succession we have the moments or forms in juxtaposition, each moment being exclusively itself; whereas in their logical order we have the *intussusception* of these forms or moments; and each is itself as well as the other two, according to the essential nature of dialectical life.

Each of them finds in this spiritual synthesis its own integration. Each is itself, but in order to be so it requires this integration which Gentile calls with an untranslatable but very adequate word *inveramento*; for any one of them loses all truth and all life if we isolate it from the others. We have a perfect illustration of the point in the fact that the conception of the subject requires and entails that of the object, the conception of which therefore may be rightly considered as the integration of that of the former. —Here Gentile has a remark that deserves careful notice: *'We could not, however, put it the other way round. It would be impossible to say that the conception of the subject is the integration of that of the object; because the object is the subject objectified, whereas the subject is not the object subjectified.'*<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly necessary to remark that this statement was bound to alarm the average orthodox thinker of any church; most probably it is responsible for the interpretation of those who understood Gentile's doctrine as implying that man has first to create the God to whom he will raise altars. In reality this proposition has nothing in it to

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *Modernismo*, Laterza, Bari, 1921, pp. 236–250.

scare the most orthodox; and the statement '*the object is the subject objectified*' before it is given a metaphysical interpretation should be put side by side with his other statement that '*the Self, root of the dualism self and not-self, i.e. subject and object, is not the self which is the opposite of the not-self, for this self springs from the first; it is not the subject which is the opposite of the object, for this subject has its principle in the first. Such self or subject is the One, the unity of the as yet undivided two terms*'. As to the logical interpretation, it can present no difficulty to post-Kantian philosophy; the conception of the object certainly required the activity through which the subject objectifies itself, and we can say that the degree of truth of any conception is in direct proportion to this self-transcending and objectifying of the subject. There is here, however, an aspect of the problem, which breeds a good deal of confusion and is responsible for all the difficulties that arise between religion and philosophy, though it does not disturb the relations of science and philosophy. *Philosophy makes God subject; and religion makes him object*; in philosophy God is the ground both of the eternal distinction and of its eternal resolution, whilst in religion He appears as one of the terms. On the other hand, nobody can fail to see that the most traditional Christian theology makes God pure Act, and thus makes Him pure subject and pure self; and nobody can deny that the goal of religion is always and everywhere the resolution of the dualism. Man may try to raise himself into God by his own exertions, or hope to be so raised entirely by God's will, but communion is always the goal.

In spite of all it remains a fact that in religious experience God is object and the not-self. That orthodox theology should understand God as pure Act proves nothing as against this essential difference of religion and philosophy; because the writings of the fathers of the Church and of the medieval schoolmen show that both the Patristic and

the Scholastic were great schools of philosophy. It is indeed idle for Neo-Thomists to be uneasy because philosophy was called during the Middle Ages *Ancilla Theologiae*; that leaves it as free and autonomous as it has always been before and since; and only means that it was its own mistress under another name. The conclusion of the medieval schools of philosophy is certainly that God is Pure Act; this, however, can only have a philosophical value. Experience tells us that in religion and for the believer God is object; and it is exceedingly difficult to shut one's eyes to the fact. The emotion that has misled so many writers on religion is real enough to point to the necessary objectivity of the object of worship; man could not feel such emotion without its having an object. Yet again it must not be overlooked that Christians have always conceived God as essentially subject, or in the traditional word, as essentially *personal*.

Before we resume Gentile's statement of his theory of Mind and its forms, we may consider whether the difference between belief and knowledge, between religion and philosophy, has not its origin in this fact, that God is essentially object for the one and subject for the other.

Belief leads us to consciousness of things and facts as well as of God, not, however, of acts and essences. The act in which we believe is necessarily reduced to the nature of a fact. We believe that something *is*; thus an act when we believe in it is already past; or if it is future, it is focussed by us as if it were past; and a past act is a fact. It is necessary to guard oneself against the surface meaning of current language. When we say 'I believe that God *is good*' we mean by God the supreme Good, and our statement is equivalent to 'I believe that God *is*.' In the same way we believe that the stairs are strong enough to carry us, and this means that we believe they *are* stairs; the purpose, the nature of stairs being to bear the weight of human beings who go up or down, we run up without

hesitation, doubt, judgement, or mediation of any kind. Again, we believe that two and two are four because we believe that arithmetic is a reality. That belief is the principle of immediacy is proved by the change in our religious experience as soon as we doubt the reality of God; by our clutching at the rail and our hesitation to rest our weight on the stairs as soon as we doubt their being real stairs, i.e. capable of bearing a man's weight; by the nervousness with which we should reckon if arithmetic could be a matter of discussion.

The ground of thought and action is belief; and, in order that we may proceed upon it, it must be static; and this is as much as to say that it must be immediate. Belief tells us that God is; knowledge alone can tell us what He is; but the presence of belief does not expel knowledge, and it is obvious that we could not say 'I believe that God is' without knowing what we mean by 'God'. For this reason Hegel thought that religion was speculative knowledge and could not therefore be immediate. He had conceived the life of his would-be transcendental triad in a purely empirical manner, which entailed the temporal succession of the forms or moments, so displayed in juxtaposition that each seemed to exclude from itself the two others. Belief is indeed immediate and yet, rich in many artistic or philosophical elements, it implies mediation. It finds its own truth in the fact that it does so, and on the other hand it is the very ground of thought and action as they appear in all the manifestations of human life.

Belief, however, is neither opinion nor even hypothesis, such as the working and fruitful hypotheses used in the various sciences; although it is present in science and underlies all scientific activity when it accepts the fact and believes in the objective existence of truth. Again, it is the ground of all human opinion as the implicit belief in the reality of the data and in the power of one's own judgement, two elements which are but too often misused and remain

most real in spite of it. It is no less different from opinion, which is essentially subjective, than from hypothesis, which is by definition subjectively assumed; and whilst as an implicit element of stability, seriousness, and objectivity it runs all through human life, it finds its own explicit form in religion where the subject matters indeed, but only as the necessary second term of a relation, which though bilateral is certainly not equilateral. It is necessary that I should know what I mean by 'God', but what moves me to action and thought is that He *is*. We may feel inclined at first sight to conclude that belief is intuition; but if we consider it further and follow it in its manifold manifestations we see that it is not the first grade of knowledge, nor bound to become an element in a mediated whole as the superior grade of knowledge is reached. As yet we cannot give a speculative account of its nature, and it is better to leave this question open than to bring it prematurely to a conclusion. The positive result of our efforts to understand belief amounts only to three statements of fact. Belief is not what Plato thought when he represented it, in the simile of the line and in that of the cave, as apprehension of reflections and shadows or at best of sensible things living or manufactured; for the object of belief is very often of a supra-sensible nature. Again, belief is not what Kant thought it was when he distinguished it from knowledge as the free play of imagination. We may agree with him that imagination is free and freely creates its own world, which may be a world of ghosts or the metaphysical world of a dogmatist of the rational school. Belief, however, is not free; it is the ground of law and does not freely create its own world, for always and everywhere it is the form of spiritual life that most strictly requires the *given*. Finally, belief is neither intuition, as it appears implicitly, nor an inferior form of philosophy, as it appears explicitly, in Hegel's theory; philosophy is the twin sister of religion, or more



accurately, philosophy and religion are the two aspects of rational thinking of which immediacy and mediation are necessary and sufficient elements, i.e. belief and knowledge. Besides all this, however, religious belief is the unique form of spiritual life that is typically both thought and action; the conviction of the believer is not the necessary and logical consequence of theoretical activity; since it implies an act of will that would not be required if all that is accepted in the given creed were known, or knowable through the ordinary channels of experience. Hence is it, that Religious belief alone has a value that is theoretical and practical. It is impossible, on the other hand, that either religion or philosophy should be found devoid of the other or should sooner or later outgrow the other. This, our own view, is grounded on Gentile's doctrine that 'the forms of Mind as forms of absolute reality are transcendental inasmuch as they transcend the real and eternal act of thought in which they are truly immanent only from the point of view of the analysis of this real and eternal act of thought.' We must translate this sentence literally because in spite of its awkward wording it throws light on the mysterious connexion of the human with the divine, and of the empirical with the transcendental. Not indeed owing to any aesthetic quality, but by its philosophical truth it gives the speculative meaning of the well known panel of Michelangelo, where God and man touch each other, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The tips of their fingers meet: and man is man, a spiritual being, exclusively in consequence of that contact. Transcendental reality, namely Mind, is immanent in the act of thought and yet transcends it; and the forms of absolute reality can be said to be immanent in the act of thought because the analysis of this act shows that they are its necessary and sufficient elements. If, however, any one of the transcendental forms or the transcendental reality as a whole is the object of our research, we do not

see it as immanent in this or that mind; though we can see it only in such single minds, we know that it essentially transcends them.

For Gentile the eternal and necessary process of thought is purely logical and not chronological; it does not imply a progression from *A* to *B*; it leads from *A* through *A'* to *A''*, through a constant development of truth. He therefore warns his reader against an interpretation of his doctrine that would understand the statement that philosophy is the form into which the others resolve themselves as implying the reality of a stage in which art and religion become philosophy, ceasing thereby to be art and religion. For him art, religion, and philosophy are transcendental. The distinction which is made between these absolute forms of mind does not entail or allow a classification of men into artists, believers, and philosophers, nor the distinction of a moment or form as purely and actually artistic from a moment or form as purely and actually philosophical. Any distinction of the kind would ignore the transcendental nature of the reality with which it deals and so lapse into an historical distinction, which is as false as that between spirit and nature; whereas even here the logical distinction between self and not-self holds good. Art is the consciousness of the subject. Religion is the consciousness of the object as pure object. It is true that the object can never be purely the object, but this means only that religion does not exist as pure religion in the historical world of experience, the only one we know. Religion in itself is that unrealizable thing which man always strives to realize altogether, while he actually realizes it in a relative manner each time he is religious. The object, abstracted from its relation with the subject, is the unknown; an unknown which, however, is somehow known, known *as* unknown. But here Gentile overlooks the difference between belief and knowledge.

This consciousness of the object absolutely exclusive of

the subject, entailing as it does the annihilation of the believer, is impossible; since to know means to take possession in knowledge of the object, and to believe entails a recognition of the object, when both the possession and the recognition require an act of consciousness. The unknown God, is always known, but He is God only in so far as He is unknown, and stands as absolutely other to the ego that worships Him. In other words we might say that unknowableness is there to satisfy a need inherent in religion; and that is sufficient to show the impossibility of reducing belief to knowledge, and religion to philosophy. Through knowledge the object is subjectified;<sup>1</sup> that is to say, is assimilated to the subject and to the knowing self; and God is essentially that which transcends the believer and is to him essentially not-self. In the sense of otherness, the sense of opposition, better still the sense of the limitation of his own autonomy and of his own self, with the consequent desire to give himself up, we have at once the true principle of religious feeling and the essential characteristics of belief. This sense of opposition and otherness is *a priori* absolute, and therefore insuperable in the life of mind, in the life of consciousness which includes the object. Gentile adds: 'and the object in its quality of object breaks our subjectivity, conquers the primitive self-consciousness, and imposes a law upon the lawless liberty of the empirical self.' Hence the inevitable conclusion: *Initium sapientiae est timor Domini*. Since we are always on the threshold of wisdom, the *timor Domini* is, and must be, for ever springing to new life. The act of thought is eternal; eternally it conquers the object that it sees eternally facing it to be eternally conquered. On the one hand, the essential characteristic of religion is mysticism; that is to say, assertion of the Absolute as extrinsic

<sup>1</sup> This first part of the statement is definitely neither sound nor Gentilian; but as the rest of the sentence is both it has been thought advisable not to tamper with the text, and to warn the reader that it is probably a slip.

to the activity that asserts it, i.e. as negation of such activity. On the other, the annihilation of the believer is, as we have seen, obviously impossible; since were he reduced to nothing he could not believe in the Absolute. It is, however, the regulative ideal towards which man always strives and must strive, so that he does not lose the sense of the nothingness which is the shadowy limit of his concrete individuality and thereby the very root of his concreteness. And if it is a mistake to identify religious mysticism or artistic aestheticism with philosophic rationalism, it is a fact that mysticism is the rationalism of religion. The saint thinks just as rationally as the philosopher; but from his spiritual point of view he must see only the object; whereas the philosopher is in a position from which the object is always seen in its synthesis with the subject. Thus the object of mysticism in comparison with that of philosophy is immediate; it is a given object, to which no movement or activity can come from the subject, who appears here devoid of either one or the other. The subject is motionless, or rather, in a given position determined by the consciousness of an object, which is all that it can be—absolute—and therefore cannot change or move. Religion is thus essentially intolerant; the truth of philosophy, *superior* in the sense that it comprehends both the object and the subject, is incompatible with religion. And if scholastic philosophy is brought forward as a proof of the contrary, it may be stated at once that no religion was ever so rationally philosophical as Christianity, and especially western Christianity. We must add that some of the thoroughly philosophical views of the great medieval doctors often met at first with the strongest opposition and always with deep suspicion from more mystical Christian quarters.

The mystic immobility is not, however, reached in any religion; for the reason, on which it is impossible to insist too much, that mind is never purely, exclusively, religious,

as it is never purely, exclusively, artistic or philosophical. The three moments with their three forms are *always* there, *eternally* there; so that it is impossible to have either a philosophy devoid of religion and art, or a religion devoid of art and philosophy, or again, to have art devoid of religion and philosophy. Philosophy is the consciousness of the *a priori* synthesis of subject and object that of necessity resolves the contradiction inherent in art and religion. The truth for this form of consciousness is in a subject which is object and in an object which is subject. In this conception of Mind philosophy is obviously not merely the philosopher's philosophy, it is the synthetic activity which always, everywhere and in every mind, is found completing and balancing the two unilateral activities of which it is alternately the light and the shadow. It lifts mind above the finiteness of the artistic consciousness, and frees it from the sense of otherness characteristic of the religious attitude. The object for religion is as infinite as the subject is for art; since each in its own sphere has no limits. The subject of which the infinity is celebrated in art is finite when it comes into relation with the object that confronts it in religion; and it can be truly infinite only in so far as it is unified with it. On the other hand there is liberty in religion, the liberty to renounce one's own liberty; and yet the artist sees in this not the fulfilment but the renunciation of liberty. My will is no will, except in so far as it is also the will of God; and the will of God for me is no will either unless it is also my will. Liberty therefore must be infinite, and infinity is, *ex vi termini* free, i.e. it must be the freedom of a subject transcending itself, and reaching thereby objectivity.

The *a priori* synthesis gives us the true reality unifying subject and object, unifying therefore liberty and law; it frees man both from the nightmare of a purely religious consciousness and from the lawless anarchy of the purely artistic consciousness, could such exist. The soul of man

cannot be deprived of this peace. Art enters his life so far as art, in order to realize itself, takes into its bosom so much of religion as it needs in order to have anything to do or say. Religion enters it so far as, in order to flourish, it becomes also philosophy. The art of each artist is his truth, as the religion of each saint is his truth. Hence the soul of every man knows peace at each moment of his life; a peace which, as the unification of his art and religion, is philosophy. It is hardly necessary to point out that, in the life of philosophy so conceived, religious and artistic elements are for ever arousing the contradictions necessary to such a life; and that their resolution would mark the death of thought. The life of mind can only be the eternal resolution of its elements; and peace of mind can only be the peace of the strong, the peace of the will which is courageous in its activity and can find its joy nowhere except in a perpetual activity. It is a peace made up of joy and sorrow. For joy and sorrow are the pulse of spiritual life and of experience; they are always acts of consciousness and of truth. To use Gentile's own illustration, no joy could ever match the sweet bitterness that tears the poet's soul when he has the intuition of the destruction awaiting him and his world, or that of the philosopher seeing the necessity of such destruction in the system of the world.

From that peace the Idealist can therefore discard nothing. Conscious of his own nature, he cannot wish to renounce what is essential to his spiritual life as he would if he rejected art or religion, absolute forms of Mind, constitutive elements of his individual mind, and as such necessary to the life of philosophy; for he knows that the latter cannot be itself without sharing the enthusiasm of the intimate life of truth or without submitting in all humility to its divine law, which bears the free sanction of reason..

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